

Thesis
2696

Neo-Sufism in Modern Arabic Poetry, 1960 – 2005

**A Study in the Poetry of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī,
Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr and Adonis**

**Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the School of Oriental and African Studies,
University of London, 2002 – 2005**

James Howarth

ProQuest Number: 11015811

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 11015811

Published by ProQuest LLC (2018). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

Abstract

This thesis brings a contemporary critical approach to the use of Sufism in Arabic poetry after 1960, focusing on three major poets, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī, Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr and Adonis. Using appropriate theoretical approaches, the objective is to make a significant contribution to the development of a post-Orientalist, interdisciplinary understanding of the Middle East’s cultural and psychological environment. It investigates the proposition that these poets have attempted to synthesize radical social and political beliefs with aspects of their spiritual and cultural heritage in order to create a visionary new conception not only of Arabic poetry but Arab civilization as a whole. The cultural institution of poetry – ‘register of the Arabs’ – has a unique spiritual and revolutionary power in a historically aniconic society in which it has been for centuries the dominant artform, enabling sensitive insight into the modern Arab existence. On the basis of an initial investigation of the artistic, philosophical and socio-political aspects of Sufism, as well its relation to modern European thought, the thesis examines how committed modernist Arab poetry shifted towards a ‘neo-Sufi’ paradigm, reviving Sufi concepts, principles and historical figures.

As such, the project focuses on the extrinsic ramifications of these poets’ neo-Sufi experiences, analysing what role Sufi ideas play in modern Arabic thought within the sphere of autocratic state ideologies and local and regional political struggles. Consequently, it considers how neo-Sufism relates to the development of a uniquely Arab postmodern condition, and how the relationship between Arabic poetry and political commitment evolved since 1960. The thesis contemplates the Arab poet both as individual and as social being, in a world where profound senses of identity confront the need for change. By investigating the constantly evolving interaction between creative, individualistic instincts and external social reality in the contexts of Arab nationalism, the Palestine question, Communism, political Islam, Western hegemony and globalisation, it aims to illuminate the predicament of the later 20th century Arab intellectual on specific and universal levels.

Acknowledgements

Many people provided valuable assistance, both practical and moral, in the completion of this thesis. First of all, the project would not have been possible without the generous financial backing of the Arts and Humanities Research Board, to whom I am extremely grateful for giving me this opportunity. I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Sabry Hafez sincerely for all his help both in putting the project on course and maintaining it with his immense knowledge and thoughtful guidance. Frode Saugestad proved a stimulating and motivated colleague when the beginning was a distant memory and the end nowhere in sight. Fatima Rawan provided indispensable help with some of the particularly difficult texts. Conor de Lion and Frank Armstrong offered proofreading and practical assistance. Working with respected authorities on Islamic history and thought such as Dr. Malise Ruthven and Prof. Muhammad Abdel Haleem has been enlightening and enjoyable. Last and certainly not least, I am especially grateful to my family for supporting me through everything. All translations are mine, with the exception of those taken from Khalil Semaan's translation of 'Abd al-Ṣabūr's *Ma'sāt al-Ḥallāj, Murder in Baghdad* (Leiden, Brill, 1972).

August 2005

For my brother, Charles, always an inspiration

Contents

Historical and Theoretical Introduction	1
Prologue	1
Part I: Historical Basis	3
Reality and Poetry Post-1948: Alienation, Fragmentation, Despair	3
The Neo-Sufi Generation: al-Bayyātī, °Abd al-Ṣabūr and Adonis	10
Part II: Theoretical Basis	16
Defining Sufism	16
<i>Fanā'</i> (annihilation) and <i>baqā'</i> (subsistence)	18
<i>Waḥdat al-wujūd</i> and <i>waḥdat al-shuhūd</i> : ontological and phenomenological monism	21
Sufism and Political Commitment: the case of al-Ḥallāj	24
Sufism, Poetry and Post-Structuralist Theory	27
Sufism and the Self	37
i) A Modern Psychological Approach	37
ii) Sufism, Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious	40
iii) Sufism and Individuation	43
iv) The Circle and the Fall	44
v) Sufism and Esoteric Chaos: Madness, Creativity and Resistance	47
The Crisis of Modernity	53
i) Split Consciousness	53
ii) Individual and Mass in Modern Society	58
iii) Nietzsche's Zarathustrian Experience	61
Specific Objectives	69
Chapter 1: The Virtuous City: The Development and Significance of °Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī's Neo-Sufism	71
The Polarities of the Forbidden Circle	80
Collective Issues: al-Bayyātī, Communism and Sufism	101
Al-Bayyātī, Existentialism and Sufism	105
Al-Bayyātī's Anti-Sufi Inclinations	109

Analysis of Individual Poems	110
Conclusion	131
Chapter 2: The Theistic Existentialist: Ṣalāḥ °Abd al-Ṣabūr's Neo-Sufism	135
Sufism and Self-Knowledge	136
The Structural Identity of Poetic Creativity and Mystical Imagination.....	139
Individual and Collective Perfection in <i>The Tragedy of al-Ḥallāj</i>	144
Choice and Responsibility in <i>The Tragedy of al-Ḥallāj</i>	146
Dynamic neo-Sufism in °Abd al-Ṣabūr's al-Ḥallāj	149
The Rejection of Ideology	152
<i>Ijtihād</i> : prophets, poets and philosophers	155
°Abd al-Ṣabūr, Existentialism and Mysticism	158
The Religio-Existential Quest.....	164
Analysis of Individual Poems	169
Conclusion	189
Chapter 3: Adonis: Total Esoteric Revolution	192
°Alawism and Esoteric Thought	193
The SSNP, °Alawism and Sufism	198
Thunder on the Desert: Miḥyār the Damascene	204
The Madness-Prophecy Dialectic and Adonis' Intellectual Forebears.....	209
Poetry as Esoteric Vision	213
Madness, Existential Transformation and Rejection of the <i>Sharī'a</i>	215
The Influence of al-Niffarī	218
Sufism and Surrealism	225
Sufi Epistemology	228
Sufi Writing and Aesthetics	233
Sufi Love, Imagination and the <i>Barzakh</i>	238
The Flux of Obscurity and Clarity	242
The <i>Qutb</i>	255
Conclusion	258

Conclusion	261
Comparative Analysis	261
i) Cultural Authenticity: the Response to a Civilizational Crisis	263
ii) Individual versus Mass and the Will to Freedom	265
iii) Mysticism and Postmodernism	267
iv) The Granada Paradigm	271
v) The <i>Metanoia</i> and Cultural Individuation	276
Stages on Life's Way	279
i) Stage 1: Pre-modern	279
ii) Stage 2: Modern	280
iii) Stage 3: Postmodern	283
Esoteric/Exoteric Postmodernity: Neo-Sufism versus Political Islam	291
Endpiece	297
Bibliography	299

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

‘My heart has become capable of every form...’ – ibn al-‘Arabī¹

Prologue

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the use of Sufism in modern Arabic poetry and thought in the post-1960 period, focusing specifically on three writers: ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī (Iraq, 1926-99), Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr (Egypt, 1931-81) and Adonis (the penname of ‘Alī Ahmad Sa‘īd, Syria, 1930-). Given the stubborn prevalence of over-simplistic oppositions between ‘East’ and ‘West’, an initial clarification of objective and method is necessary. While geographical and historical specifications are inevitable, this thesis rejects *a priori* the notion of definitive distinctions between cultural enclaves; indeed, this would be an entirely inappropriate approach to the study of mysticism, which precisely cuts across cultural boundaries towards a profound common humanity.

The sceptic might well argue that any open-minded dialogue between ‘East’ and ‘West’ is impossible so long as the latter remains linguistically and conceptually dominant, ‘dictating all the time the nature and direction of the exchange’.² However, Western culture is not an encapsulated entity, entirely separate from the ‘Orient’. Furthermore, besides the well-documented ‘political domination, economic exploitation [and] religious proselytism’,³ an East-West exchange of an entirely different nature has also occurred: one involving self-analysis, self-criticism, and a mutual search for identity.⁴ The intellectual hybridity of the poets studied in this thesis – the result of a deep engagement with both the European and the Arab-Islamic heritage – in itself further demonstrates the invalidity of discrete notions of ‘East’ and ‘West’. As such, they can be seen in the context of a long-standing dialectical exchange within and between overlapping civilizations.

¹ Muḥy al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī, The Interpreter of Desires, tr. Reynold A. Nicholson *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, (Theosophical Publishing House, London, 1978), p. 67

² J.J. Clarke, *Jung and Eastern Thought: A Dialogue with the Orient*, (Routledge, London, 1994) p. 191

³ Halbfass, quoted in Clarke, *ibid*, p. 9

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 9-11

While scholars of the humanities must be aware of their own intellectual ‘fore-structures’ – the set of presumptions and expectations underlying the production of judgments, opinions, or even ‘facts’ – valid viewpoints on modern Arab thought nonetheless remain both accessible and necessary. The fact that a doctoral thesis, by definition, is historically and geographically located does not preclude its legitimacy *per se*. However, as Hans-Georg Gadamer has pointed out, ‘all reading involves application, so that a person reading a text is himself part [or even all] of the meaning he apprehends.’⁵ A study of modern Arabic poets will inevitably contain as much of the analyser as of the analysed: interpretation is a restless dialogue between reader and text, and no single, solid meaning lies waiting to be discovered. As Heraclitus said, ‘Things keep their secrets’⁶: the hermeneutical circle refuses to be definitively closed.

Moreover, in the present time and context, the scholar of humanities is heir to not only the Enlightenment enterprise, but the many and diverse strands of human knowledge that constitute the ‘conversation of mankind’. The present project does not claim any universally objective or final perspective on the historical period in question, but aims merely to contribute positively to that conversation. It will therefore be undertaken within the broadest possible framework, namely in terms of a ‘world civilization,’ which is at once a single narrative involving an endless interplay of sub-themes and sub-plots. This approach can be defined, idealistically perhaps, as ‘transmodern’: an inherently pluralistic and decentred viewpoint celebrating the validity of alternative modernisms, insofar as this is possible given the aforesaid epistemological problems.

⁵ Gadamer, quoted in *ibid*, p. 45

⁶ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, tr. Brooks Haxton, (Penguin, London, 2001), p. 9

Part I: Historical Basis

Reality and Poetry Post-1948: Alienation, Fragmentation, Despair

The middle of the 20th century was a time of considerable upheavals in the political and cultural landscape of the Arab world. Foremost among these was the Palestinian disaster, *al-Nakba*, in 1948, in civilizational terms an episode of seismic proportions whose effects can be traced to the present time. Of this event Edward Said has written:

Not only did 1948 put forth unprecedented challenges to a collectivity already undergoing the political evolution of several European centuries compressed into a few decades... but [it] put forward a monumental enigma, an existential mutation for which Arab history was unprepared.⁷

This year, then, inaugurated both a new phase of Western hegemony in the region and a watershed in Arab consciousness and existential speculation. Identifying the writer's role directly with the problematics of Arab contemporaneity, Said continues:

[The Nakba] exposed the Arabs' disunity, lack of technological culture, political unpreparedness, and so on; more significant, however, was the fact that the disaster caused a rift to appear between the Arabs and the very possibility of their historical continuity as a people... Unless Arab culture, employing the full resources of its specificity... could participate freely in its own self-making, it would be as if it did not exist... No Arab could say that in 1948 he was in any serious way detached or apart from the events in Palestine. He might reasonably say that he was shielded from Palestine; but he could not say – because his language and his religious cultural tradition implicated him at every turn – that he was any less a loser, an Arab, as a result of what happened in Palestine. Furthermore nothing in his history... gave him an adequate method for representing the Palestine drama to himself. Arab nationalism, Islamic traditionalism, regional creeds, small-scale communal or village solidarities – all these stopped short of the general result of Zionist success and the particular experience of Arab defeat. No concept seemed large enough, no language precise enough to take in the common fate.⁸

⁷ Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and other Literary and Cultural Essays*, (Granta, London, 2001), p. 46

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 47

The spirit of rejection and commitment that dominated Arabic literature in the 1950s sprang to a large extent from the shock and humiliation of this event, the defeat of the Arab nation despite its glorious history. On a spiritual level, the predicament to some extent mirrored that of the European intellectual in 1914, when it became clear that, far from assisting humanity towards salvation, modern science and technology could well provide the catalyst for its final annihilation. Just as the onset of World War I in 1914 represented ‘the beginning of the end of the bourgeois civilization of Europe’, 1948 represented a turning point between a time of relative innocence, characterised by a romantic movement in Arabic poetry, and one of realism and regrouping, characterised by *adab multazim* (committed literature) and the ‘Unionist’ period spearheaded by Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir. In the context of defeat, and its consequent undermining of the entire Arab *Weltanschauung*, it is no surprise that many Arab poets saw in T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* an expression of their own predicament.

In 1914, European man awoke to find his supposedly enlightened world a shattered dream, revealing that the ‘apparent stability, security, and material progress of society had rested, like everything human, upon the void. [He came] face to face with himself as a stranger. When he ceased to be contained and sheltered within a stable social and political environment, he saw that his rational and enlightened philosophy could no longer console him with the assurance that it satisfactorily answered the question *What is man?*’⁹ 1948, likewise, focused the Arab intellectual’s attention towards existential questions: what is an Arab and what is his/her place in the modern world?

In this new era, Arab man came face to face with the terrifying contingency of everything, painfully aware not only of his own human finitude but that of the entire heritage. In Said’s words, ‘the present may after all be only that, perhaps not a consequence of the past and certainly not a basis for the future.’¹⁰ The triumph of secular Zionism, a symbol of continued external dominance, exposed the religious conception of life as outdated and fatally flawed, leaving him an uprooted and fragmentary being. This was not only physical, through exile, but also psychological: it highlighted the existential split between man and his self. The search for a new collective narrative, a new “Arab idea” to hold together a shattered identity and history, was

⁹ William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existentialist Philosophy*, (Anchor, New York, 1990), p. 34

¹⁰ Said, *op.cit.*, p. 55

reflected in post-1948 poetry: it was simultaneously a rupture with the past and an attempt to rediscover it and remould it along new lines.

In the 1950s, renewed hope and optimism was provided by the doctrine of Arab nationalism, which coincided with major changes not only in the form of Arabic poetry, after centuries of prosodic inertia, but also its style and tenor, moving away from romantic sentimentality towards a socialist realism more capable of reflecting the bleak reality. Committed literature was both a reaction of the shock of modernity and the rise of nationalism and also the result of younger Arab intellectuals' interest in Marxist philosophy, which became available during and after World War II, and the considerable impact of European existentialists such as Sartre and Camus. Throughout the 1950s, the free verse movement, which began in Iraq in 1947, still entailed a revolutionary poetic form which afforded far greater scope for self-expression than was previously the case; by the early 1960s, however, the internal inconsistencies and corruption of supposed revolutionary or regenerative ideologies, such as pan-Arabism and Ba'athism, was increasingly clear. In the gap between rhetoric and reality the committed Arab poet would attempt to carve out a meaningful existence. Despite the new generation of leaders, the structure of life remained essentially unchanged, leading in 1967 to further defeat and ideological turmoil. It was this ideological breakdown that paved the way for a general shift towards cultural authenticity and the reconstruction of an indigenous heritage – or romanticized versions thereof – which would assume very different forms. The drift back towards the Arab heritage, and specifically Islam, is usually traced back to 1967. In this context, neo-Sufism will be analysed as a movement both back towards submerged elements of this heritage and forward towards a new dialogue with them, whilst at the same time predating the 1967 “setback”.

By the early 1960s, then, the initial optimism of the Egyptian and Iraqi revolutions had worn off to reveal a renewed disillusionment and despair. This marked the beginning of a new phase in Arabic literature, informed by the struggles to resolve the new problems of the post-colonial era: the lack of cultural cohesion, the loss of traditional stability, the conflicts between different social classes and visions, the ongoing issues of urbanization.¹¹ The post-independence period brought social and ideological debate, socio-political pluralism, a more individualistic outlook, the

¹¹ Sabry Hafez, 'The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel's Aesthetic Response', *BSOAS* 57, (1994), p.

disintegration of patriarchal structures and the concomitant fragmentation of social harmony, internal discord and sectarian violence, and, most notably, a deeply alienated and ruptured sense of selfhood. In short, this period burst apart and left open to question all that had been held together by the oppressive but unifying presence of the imperialist other.

The so-called “setback” or *Naksa* in 1967 heralded a collective outpouring of anger, despair and resentment on the part of Arab intellectuals, ‘a vast and continuing literature in self-analysis’¹² which was often marked by a sense of guilt: ‘no Arab can have been immune from the feeling that his modern history, so laboriously created... would prove so easy to brush aside in the test. The almost incredible outpouring of print after 1967 suggests a vast effort at reconstructing that history and that reality.’¹³ Thereafter, with the irrefutable corruption and decay of military regimes exposed, the increasing rejection of reality and spiritual angst among Arab poets led them inevitably towards immersion in projects of psychological reconstruction: the only remaining way to restore meaning and purpose to the world was via a renewed selfhood.

On a cultural level, the rapidly developing socio-political reality of the 1960s generated not only distrust of modernisation, which was synonymous with the aggressive Western powers, and a renewed Islamic ideology, but also a more profound dialogue with the Arabic literary and cultural tradition, including the exploration of more peripheral cultural strands such as the oral, the popular/folk, and the pre-Islamic. A greater plurality of previously marginalised voices – either by race, creed or gender – began to open up the scope of Arabic literature. At the same time, particularly through writers in exile, the spread and influence of European thought continued in new and different forms, albeit from a more critical perspective, and Arabic poetry closed the developmental gap between itself and world poetry. This period also saw an important shift from metonymic to metaphorical rules of reference, which had the effect of

liberating the literary text from slavish adherence to the logic and order of social reality and allowing for occasional flights of fancy, the dissolution of time, a wider gap between the world of art and that of reality and a higher degree of textual autonomy. The relationship between the literary work and reality [was] no

¹² Issa J. Boullata, ‘Challenges to Arab Cultural Authenticity’, in Hishām Sharābī, ed. *The Next Arab Decade*, (Mansell, London, 1998), p. 148

¹³ Said, *op.cit.*, p. 59

longer based on similarity but on difference, and their interaction [became] that of two autonomous, though related entities.¹⁴

After the formal and technical changes starting in the late 1940s, this decade heralded a new vision that attempted to encompass the entirety of man's experience.

In this bewildering post-1948 world, Arab intellectuals found themselves victims of a threefold exile: that of physical separation, that of rootlessness and severance of a meaningful link with their history, and that of existential meaninglessness. The latter is, of course, part of the modern human condition: 'the modern period itself [is] spiritually orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement.'¹⁵ The mood was further characterised by rejection, anxiety, powerlessness, uprootedness, fragmentation and loss (of purpose and identity), which in some cases combined to generate a profound sense of despair. Oppression was a double-edged sword, both internal and external. Internally, the revolutions of the 1950s had given way to military regimes that were increasingly totalitarian and out of touch with their peoples. Externally, the consistent political, economic and cultural dominance of the West meant that Arab-Islamic civilization was either in terminal decline or urgently required some sort of revival. This despair at the predicament of the modern Arab reached its apotheosis in 1967, when the crushing military defeat brought an end to the pan-Arabist doctrine and further underlined the precariousness of Arab civilization and existence.

Alienation and despair, therefore, define the modern Arab predicament: a spiritually ruptured and marginalised existence from which the individual searches desperately for relief. If Simone Weil was correct in stating that 'to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul,' then the effects would be catastrophic. In this context, the influence on Arab poets of European existentialist thought, which issued in a comparable spiritual alienation, is hardly surprising. The latter was prompted by

a sense of the basic fragility and contingency of human life; the impotence of reason confronted with the depths of existence; the threat of Nothingness, and the solitary and unsheltered condition of the individual

¹⁴ Hafez, *op.cit.*, pp. 99-100

¹⁵ Said, *op.cit.*, p. 173

before this threat. One can scarcely subordinate these problems logically to one another; each participates in all the others, and they all circulate around a common center. A single atmosphere pervades them all like a chilly wind: the radical feeling of human finitude.¹⁶

The commonality between Europe and the Arab world was, of course, the decline and fall of the all-embracing religious worldview (Christianity, Islam) in the face of modern reason, the effect of which, according to the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) was precisely despair: 'a sickness of the spirit' or a 'sickness unto death'.¹⁷ When a society can no longer reconcile religion with reality, it is faced with a choice: either redouble its efforts to maintain the integrity of the religion, on the grounds that the 'sickness' was caused by a lack of proper observance; or to dispense with it altogether, on the grounds that it is no longer tenable and hinders individual fulfilment. The latter course requires a new conviction to replace the old, since man's religious instinct cannot be rationalised out of existence.

Either way, for a civilization – not to say the individuals of whom it consists – that senses its very existence to be under threat, such a dilemma becomes critical. It came at a time when, in an increasingly globalised world, the colonial subjugation of Arab lands had been supplanted by less direct, but no less pervasive, forms of hegemony. The contrast between an economically and militarily dominant West, with its Israeli ally, and an East whose organic development towards modernity – despite its rapid acceleration since the 19th century – had become distorted by the new imperialisms, rendered the conundrum considerably more complex. In the face of defeat, those on either side would find evidence to support their case. For the religionists, maintaining Arab authenticity in the face of modernity was synonymous with an Islamic revival at all levels of life. For secular poets of the 1960s, any re-evaluation and redefinition of that heritage would necessarily uphold its pluralist and dynamic characteristics and encompass its more marginal and unorthodox elements. Emerging from the remnants of disillusioned leftist movements across the region, they turned to a radically different and subversive conception of existence, on both specific and universal terms. Rather than attempting to resuscitate transcendent religion in a godless world, they would draw on ancient mythology, irrational philosophy and eastern mysticism to express both external political commitment and inner existential concerns. Such a

¹⁶ Barrett, *op.cit.*, p. 36

¹⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, (Penguin, London 1989), p. 43

hybridised philosophy implicitly questions both Sufism's 'religious' status and their 'secular' status, and undermines the notion of a definitive boundary between the two.

The decades following World War II saw a proliferation of third-world liberation movements, which often generated a simultaneous demand for revolution and tradition, connecting the past with the future. In the Arab world, there were similar attempts to regenerate the formidable heritage, of which Sufism is one part, in the light of modern principles in order to make sense of the future, albeit from many different angles. This synthesis attempted to restore meaning not only to the present but also to the past, reinterpreting the experiences of medieval poets and mystics to help illuminate the way forward.

The Neo-Sufi Generation: al-Bayyātī, °Abd al-Sabūr and Adonis

The choice of these three well-known and distinguished Arab poets as case studies for the development of neo-Sufism rests on several criteria. Firstly, each in their own way stands out among modern Arab poets as having used, or engaged in a dialogue with, the Sufi tradition in their work. This is reflected in the depth and originality of their thought, in the richness and diversity of output, and in their considerable influence on other Arab poets. Secondly, given their different national, religious and ideological backgrounds, this dynamic generation represents an effective cross-section of an intellectual development across the cultural centres of the Middle East and beyond. All born within a five-year period (1926-1931), their simultaneous trajectories and mutual interaction offer ample opportunity for comparison and contrast. Thirdly, their different approaches towards and experiments with Sufism will help to clarify the nature of the movement, if indeed it can be seen as such. Above all, these were central figures in the revitalisation of Arabic poetry in the 20th century, and pioneers of a new discourse that captured the Arab *Zeitgeist* in the post-1967 period.

The grandson of an imām, °Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī (1926-99) was born near the shrine of the 12th century Sufi °Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī in Baghdad. After graduating from Baghdad University and publishing his first collection of poetry in 1950, he taught Arabic language and literature. One of the first poets to break away from classical forms and embrace free verse, by 1954 he had become the editor of an influential cultural magazine *al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīda* (New Culture) and produced a second volume, to wide literary acclaim. However, due to his involvement in radical leftist politics, the magazine was closed down and he was dismissed from his teaching post and jailed. The following year he began a four-decade period of intermittent exile, ending up in a series of Arab and European capitals. After the 1958 Iraqi revolution, he returned to Baghdad and was eventually appointed as Iraqi cultural attaché, first in Moscow and later in Madrid, an enriching experience that influenced many of his poems. Al-Bayyātī's peripatetic way of life affected him deeply, and exile became a major motif in his work. Despite the alienation and suffering, it enabled him to maintain a fluid, progressive and insightful existential outlook. In 1995, Ṣaddām Ḥusayn's government stripped him of his Iraqi citizenship after he attended a cultural festival in Saudi Arabia. He died in Damascus in August 1999, aged 73.

Al-Bayyātī's committed modernist poetry was one of the most important experiments dominating the literary scene in the latter 20th century. One of the most renowned and prolific members of the vibrant Iraqi poetry scene, he saw the artist's role as inextricably bound up with the people, dedicated to resisting oppression and promoting social justice. The themes of freedom, exile, death and love are paramount in the work of this self-proclaimed revolutionary, who says of himself: 'rebellion was born within me at my first cry in the midwife's hand...'¹⁸ The Iraqi revolution of 1958 brought him great hope and optimism, but the setback of 1967 had a shattering effect, prompting bitter self-criticism and self-condemnation. By this point, his realist style had developed towards a more mature, complex and multilayered voice, 'enriched and deepened by disillusionment and the tragic complexities of existence.'¹⁹ Over time, he began to add a strongly introspective dimension to his passionate commitment, exploring universal, mythological and mystical themes through a series of poetic masks.

The poet and dramatist Ṣalāh ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr (1931-81), who was born in Zaḳāzīq, Egypt, was also an exponent of realist literature during the 1950s. Unlike al-Bayyātī, however, he was deeply religious in his youth, and had memorized the Qur'ān by the age of eight. His later interest in mysticism can be traced directly back to this early period, and he tells of an ecstatic religious experience he underwent as a 14-year-old boy in which, after spending a whole night devoted in prayer, he fell into a delirium not unlike the *shatḥiyyāt* of the Sufis. Educated at the University of Cairo, he was appointed editor of the influential monthly *al-Kātib* before becoming Undersecretary of State for Culture and subsequently head of Egyptian Book Organisation prior to his sudden death in 1981. His first collection of poetry, *al-Nās fī Bilādī* (The People of my Country, 1957), was considered an immediate success, and he later received the State Prize for Literature for his verse play interpretation of the trial and execution of the famous Sufi al-Ḥallāj, *Ma'sāt al-Ḥallāj* (The Tragedy of al-Ḥallāj, 1963). He published several other major verse plays and volumes, culminating in *al-Ibḥār fī al-Dhākira* (Sailing in Memory, 1979).

ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr is seen as one of the most modern of 20th century Arab poets, expressing man's predicament in the contemporary Arab world in a register very similar to contemporary Arabic.

¹⁸ ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī al-Shi'riyya*, (Al-Mu'assassa Al-ʿArabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, Beirut, 1994) p. 9

¹⁹ M.M. Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975) p. 213

Rather than focusing particularly on political issues like al-Bayyātī, during his shorter lifetime °Abd al-Ṣabūr went further in exploring the correspondence between existentialist concerns and Sufī concepts, becoming a leading exponent of the resurgence of Sufism in modern Arabic poetry in the 1960s. His early realistic poetry about village life revealed a strong social commitment, in a spirit similar to the prose writer Yūsuf Idrīs. However, by his second volume, this initial realism was yielding to more metaphysical concerns and, particularly, mystical inclinations. Like al-Bayyātī's shift from open Marxism towards the inner experience, he began to turn away from the socialist ideal towards an increasingly personal vision which, according to Badawī, 'alternates between a mild form of mysticism and melancholy meditations on death and... despair'.²⁰ This tendency towards introspection and overpowering pessimism grew stronger throughout the 1960s, and particularly after 1967 and the demise of Arab nationalism, which occasioned a general withdrawal from the painful external reality. His poetry reflected a nightmarish world inhabited by spiritually emaciated human subjects. In the volume *Ta'ammulāt fī Zaman Jarīh* (Meditations on a Wounded Age, 1969), he suffers from a recurring nightmare in which he is shot, disembowelled and hung as a museum exhibit, once again recalling the fate of al-Ḥallāj. In his autobiographical prose work, *Ḥayātī fī al-Shi'ar* (My Life in Poetry, 1969), °Abd al-Ṣabūr draws on ancient Greek, modern European and Sufī thought to promote 'a basically moral and spiritual view of poetry which he now regards as closely akin to mysticism, and he devotes much space to criticism of the conventional Marxist view, pointing out that poetry affirms values like truth, freedom, justice.'²¹

Adonis (b.1930), whom critics have described as the foremost contemporary Arab poet, responsible for a revolution in poetic language, imagery and approach, was born in the village of Qasābīn, near Latakia in the mountains of north-western Syria. Until the age of fourteen he lived there with his father, a learned man who schooled him in Arab culture and Islamic sciences. The family was from the °Alawīs, an extreme heterodox branch of Shi'ism. After receiving a scholarship for secondary school in Ṭarṭūs, he later enrolled at the Syrian University in Damascus and received a doctorate from St. Joseph's University in Beirut for his thesis 'The Static and Dynamic in Arabic Culture'. Adonis' formative years saw involvement in the Syrian National Socialist Party, and he is said to have been close to its leader, Anṭūn Sa'adah. Although not

²⁰ Ibid, p. 217

²¹ Ibid, p. 218

involved at its inception, Adonis' role in the development of the free verse movement and new poetry was pivotal. In 1957, having relocated to Beirut and acquired Lebanese citizenship, he established a modernist poetry magazine in partnership with the poet Yūsuf al-Khāl, entitled *Shiʿr* (Poetry). The latter became a vehicle for many of the most important poetic experiments, developing alongside *al-Ādāb*, its more ideologically committed counterpart, as a magazine dedicated to poetry in its own right. At this time Adonis was involved in what would become known as the Tammūzī movement, which employed the ancient Phoenician god of rebirth and renewal as the symbol of a new future. This archetypal theme accounts for the poet's choice of penname. In 1960 he received a scholarship to study at the Sorbonne in Paris, during which time he wrote the groundbreaking work *Aghānī Mihyār al-Dimashqī* (*Songs of Mihyar the Damascene*), which achieved a balance between poetry's socio-political role and a symbolic 'language of absence'. During the 1960s he moved on from *Shiʿr* to take a variety of journalistic posts, including the editorship of a Beirut newspaper, and also published his definitive *Anthology of Arabic Poetry*. As a poet and theorist, his innovative ideas began to exercise a powerful influence on his contemporaries and younger poets. By 1968 he had launched a new literary journal named *Mawāqif*, a more culturally and politically oriented journal subtitled "Freedom, Creativity and Change". In the first edition, Adonis gave further illustration of his radical vision of Arab culture, defining the new journal as 'our expression, a living part of us, our complement; therefore, it is simultaneously a truth and a symbol; it represents the shattering of an Arabic generation which experienced only what was broken; in this journal we will search and start building anew.' True to this credo, *Mawāqif* became one of very few forums in which writers could express themselves freely. Subsequent to its launch, Adonis taught at the Lebanese University until 1985, when he returned to Paris as professor of Arabic at the Sorbonne.

Adonis' iconoclastic and controversial perspectives on the Arab predicament have won him both friends and enemies, who have taken his criticisms as a wholesale rejection of the culture and identification with 'the West'. He believes that this culture has become essentially static, and only a total re-evaluation of the Arab heritage and values would enable it to once again contribute positively and originally to world civilization. He asserts that such a radical change can be achieved by delving into this heritage – of which poetry is a major part – and developing its positive, dynamic aspects in tandem with those of other civilizations. As such, he has attempted to relate Arabic poetry and thought to the wider global setting without having it lose its own

identity. He has constantly endeavoured to transcend the traditional concept of the poem, emphasizing originality, creativity, and the breaking of boundaries and conventions, although his diction is more classical than, for example, °Abd al-Şabūr's vernacular style. With an acute sensibility towards the natural world and a profound knowledge of Arabic literature since pre-Islamic times, his poetry appears to function in a hyper-reality beyond the mundane world of binary oppositions, aiming for a unity between words and things. In short, Adonis' poetry attempts nothing short of a radical reorientation or revitalization of Arab civilization.

In this struggle against the stagnation to which, in his eyes, Arab life has succumbed, Adonis sees exile – literally or metaphorically – as a pivotal motif. He believes that such stagnation derives primarily from the fact that orthodox religious doctrines have denied poetry, among other arts, its right to innovation, nullifying its role and cognitive mission and reducing it to a mere ideological tool with which to celebrate the Truth of Qur'ānic revelation. Poetry, as the highest linguistic art form and one existing within a 'divine' language, has seen its essential creativity undermined by a social, cultural and political force dominating that same language. He has therefore dedicated himself to the immense – perhaps Sisyphean – endeavour of freeing it, and thereby culture in general, from such shackles, to help create a real future for the modern Arab world.

Fundamentally, Adonis' poetry reflects a universal vision of harmony, integration and oneness, implying that the modern Arab must embrace the other and stand outside his own culture in order to know himself. In this context the other can be understood either as the unconscious / esoteric – man's psychic other – or the cultural other of the West. Adonis envisions a future Arab culture transcending divisions altogether through a dialectical creative activity between these selves and others, subordinating geographical specificity to universal human dignity: 'All my struggle could be said to be centred around this goal: for the geographic homeland to become a living part of the creative and universal one. No East, no West: only a man in one world.'²² Such a multilayered fusion of self and other is analogous to that between the Sufi and God. To articulate this vision he has used an array of forms, images, moods, rhythms and voices, creating a discourse of simultaneous harmony and difference.

²² Adonis, 'Beyond East/West: Toward a Culture of the Future', delivered at Dartmouth College, 19th May, 2001.

These three poets, al-Bayyātī, ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr and Adonis, have each been profoundly affected by the social, political and cultural predicament of their fellow Arabs. Although their conceptions of the artist’s role have taken different trajectories, the relationship between the modern struggle and the dynamic and revolutionary principles inherent in Sufism may provide common ground. While al-Bayyātī, who was deeply convinced of poetry’s role in the fight for social justice and political freedom, personally suffered the injustice of Iraq’s political system through dismissal, imprisonment and exile,²³ Adonis, too, was imprisoned without trial for political activities.²⁴ All three expressed a commitment – explicit or implicit – to a human ideal, however they chose to represent it, and a rejection of the existing political and/or cultural order. Al-Bayyātī’s use of Sufism would have to be reconciled with his longstanding Marxist and existentialist inclinations, while ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr would attempt to fuse the individual nature of the Sufi experience with social responsibility. The presence of Sufi characters and concepts in their poetry suggests not only an increasing disillusionment with attempts to transform society, but also a quest to create the perfect human archetype for whom perfection of self meant simultaneously perfection of society, thereby creating a just and equal world redefined on its own terms rather than those of the imperialist or totalitarian oppressor.

²³ Al-Bayyātī, *Ḥubb wa Mawt wa Nafy: Love, Death and Exile*, tr. Bassam K. Frangieh, (Georgetown University Press, Washington, 1990), pp. 2-3

²⁴ Adonis, *Banipal 2*, (June 1998), p. 35

Part II: Theoretical Basis

Defining Sufism

Given the centrality of Sufism to the project, one awkward and recurrent problem must be addressed: what is it? This question has not been answered with any precision or authority in the literature on the subject, due to the broadness and diversity of the Sufi tradition and the inherent difficulties in attaching linguistic definitions to esoteric disciplines. Consequently, attempts to define Sufism tend towards descriptions of its concepts and practices, such as the principle of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of existence) or the *dhikr* ritual (repetition of devotional formulae). Its elusive nature is evident when Lings describes it as ‘a touchstone, an implacable criterion which reduces everything else, except its own equivalents, to a flat surface of two dimensions only, being itself the real dimension of height and depth.’²⁵ Schimmel writes that in its formative period Sufism meant ‘an interiorization of Islam, a personal experience of the central mystery of Islam, that of *tawḥīd*, “to declare that God is one”,²⁶ while another scholar defines it as ‘the esoteric or inward (*bāṭin*) aspect of Islam’.²⁷

However, these variable approaches, epitomised in the famous Sufi story of the elephant in the dark²⁸, are in general agreement that Sufism is ‘the phenomenon of mysticism within Islam,’²⁹ i.e., a body of esoteric doctrine and practice based loosely upon the Qur’ān. Historically, it is considered to have emerged as a spiritual counterpoint to the political and military expansion of the early Islamic era, maintaining the inner meaning of the new religion. Herein the movement’s alternative and radical nature, which would later appeal to modern secular poets, can already be discerned. From the start, the Sufis rejected the external world in favour of an inner journey towards God, a mystical path that transcends religious boundaries. Naturally, Sufism did not arise in a spiritual or philosophical vacuum: influences as varied as neo-Platonism, Aristotelianism, Christian monasticism, ancient Iranian religions and nomadic Buddhist monks have been proposed and disputed at length. Given its debatable origins, it will be suitable here to view it in

²⁵ Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (George Allen & Unwin, Surrey, 1975), p. 8

²⁶ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (N.C. University Press, Chapel Hill, 1975), p. 17

²⁷ Titus Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, (Ashraf Press, Lahore, 1963), p. 3

²⁸ I. Shah, *The Sufis*, (Octagon Press, London, 1999), p. 36

²⁹ Louis Massignon, ‘Taṣawwuf’, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (EI) ed. Bearman et al. New ed., (Leiden, Brill, 2000)

the wider context of man's relationship with reality and the self, as opposed to a mere subsection of Islamic culture.

Rather than attempting a historical synopsis, it is more appropriate to establish the characteristics of the Sufi *experience*. The Sufi's ultimate objective is, broadly speaking, to achieve a 'mystical union' with God, i.e. integration of the self, in order to become *al-insān al-kāmil*, the perfect man. To reach this state, the Sufi passes through various ascending levels of consciousness, notably *fanā'*, annihilation of the ego, and *baqā'*, subsistence in God. Through this experience, Divine Truth is gradually unveiled to the seeker, until he stands before God's face or acquires His characteristics. The authenticity of this Sufi path was originally vested in various Qur'anic passages and the exemplary model of the Prophet Muḥammad. Over time, this intense spiritual discipline generated a corpus of esoteric (*bāṭini*) knowledge with a distinctive Islamic colouring, such as Muḥy al-Dīn ibn al-°Arabī's (1165-1240) transcendental theosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

In discussing Sufism, it must be emphasized that esoteric vision does not *deny* the physical world, but transcends it: there is no pearl without a shell. Since visionary endeavours meet at a point beyond the limits of intellectual enquiry, there are clear difficulties in defining the Sufi experience. Nevertheless, the present objective is to relate it a proposed 'neo-Sufi' trend in modern Arabic poetry. This is not to suggest that certain modern Arab poets subscribed fully to the principles of Sufism, but to ask whether such principles became part of a distinctive outlook on Arab and human existence. The question, therefore, is to what extent these secular modernist thinkers considered certain Sufi principles applicable to the contemporary age, or used them as a means of expression. Did these poets utilise particular Sufi ideas, motifs and personalities as means to revitalize their psychological and socio-political realities, and if so, why? In this context, then, 'Sufism' refers both to the inner kernel of esoteric thought and its historical proponents, such as ibn al-°Arabī or al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (858-922). However, to contextualise and comprehend the place of Sufism in modern Arabic poetry first requires examination of its key concepts.

Fanā' (annihilation) and baqā' (subsistence)

The mystical withdrawal from the world implies escapism and indifference towards the fate of mankind. However, the Sufi dialectic of *fanā'* and *baqā'* challenges this assumption, since the *unio mystica*, or the numinous experience, is merely a temporary transcendence of the world. The terms *fanā'* and *baqā'* refer to specific stages on the Sufi path that are both antithetical and complementary: 'annihilation' of the self and its 'subsistence' in God's attributes,³⁰ or the replacement of the mystic's human consciousness by a supposedly pure, divine consciousness.³¹ *Fanā'* is not the disappearance of the human self – the Sufi naturally remains physically present – but the transition towards creating the 'perfect selfhood'.³² To more orthodox-inclined Sufis, *fanā'* does not imply complete fusion between man and God. In any case, it is not the apex of the mystical journey, since it is followed by the more perfect stage of *baqā'*, 'a return to the mystic's consciousness of the plurality of the... world. The second follows from the first, since being with God means also being with the world which has been created by God and in which He is manifested, however imperfectly... This "return" to the world [is not] a simple return to the pre-*fanā'* state of the mystic, since his experience has given him an altogether new insight [with which] to perceive its inadequacies and to endeavour to make it more perfect.'³³

Therefore, at the apex of the Sufi journey, the seeker is not removed from the world, but inextricably involved in it through a restored and revitalized sense of selfhood, one transformed by mystic experience. The perfect self, subsistent in God, is the world in symbolic form: microcosm of macrocosm. Since the transformed Sufi sees the world as the manifestation of God, his actions constitute both a form of worship and an affirmation of the unity of existence. Moreover, given the identity of self and world, it would be entirely erroneous to suppose that the Sufi 'perfect man' disregards socio-political reality. On the contrary, his complete, i.e. prophetic, consciousness allows him unique insight into the complexities of human existence. In this sense, the prophet - 'mystic par excellence' – being simultaneously with God and the world, has a mission to perfect it in divine Truth. He is the ideal human being, uniting words with actions, inner perfection with outer responsibility. Thus his own personal perfection cannot be complete

³⁰ F. Raḥmān, 'Baqā' wa Fanā', *EI*, vol 1, p. 951

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 951

³² *Ibid*, p. 951

³³ *Ibid*, p. 951

until all of mankind is perfected: he must bring others towards God. The Sufi prophet eschews hermetic solipsism and lives in and for his community, shaping the destiny of humanity. *Baqā'*, then, the highest state of Sufi consciousness, is a dynamic *return* to the world after the abstraction of *fanā'*.

If *baqā'* can be compared to a renewed selfhood through unmediated contact with the unconscious, then the mystical poet, like the prophet, may harness its profound revolutionary power. His mission, too, is to transform himself and the world, with words as his means. *Baqā'*, the rebirth of the spirit, inheres a mutual inclusivity between psychological fulfilment and political commitment, and is therefore amenable to the aspirations of the modern secular intellectual who strives for truth on both individual and collective levels.

The Sufi path, then, rose from the false notion of the autonomous subject, which could be controlled by more powerful external forces, to the self transformed and guided by identification with 'God'. The modern Arab poets would aim to cultivate not the passivity and hierarchy of the traditional *shaykh-murīd* relationship, but an active, transformed selfhood through which individuals and societies could recreate their own destiny. This is individual rather than institutionalised Sufism, *experience* rather than tradition. Historically, Sufis realised this active self by passing through the stages of the mystical path, graduating from rejection of the status quo and realisation of a lack in the ego towards the apex of the esoteric journey where an integrated, fortified self could create a new order.

The esoteric conception of the divine, which stresses immanence and presence, stands in direct contrast to the exoteric conception, which implies transcendence or absence. Identification with this 'God' was traditionally achieved by the Sufi 'not through the passive acceptance of traditional ideologies or any prevailing hegemonic discourse but through a direct experience of one's true condition as a desiring subject.'³⁴ Through this the individual became inspired to question all inherited 'truth' and to strive to perfect his broader human environment as a part of self-perfection. It is such dynamic aspects of Sufism – its fuller engagement with the fate of humanity – that a modern Arab poet might appropriate as part of a radical vision of the future.

³⁴ Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis and Islam* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1997) p. 267

As Lings puts it, 'When the exile turns his face in the direction of Mecca he aspires above all, if he is a Sufi, to the inward return, to the reintegration of the fragmented finite individual self into the Infinitude of the Divine Self.'³⁵

³⁵ Lings, *op.cit.*, p. 37

Wahdat al-wujūd and wahdat al-shuhūd: ontological and phenomenological monism

The Sufi principle of *wahdat al-wujūd*, the ‘unity of existence’ or ontological monism, which is traditionally attributed to Ibn al-ʿArabī³⁶, is an emanationist theosophy in which the Sufi may take on the attributes of God. An alternative conception, *wahdat al-shuhūd*, or phenomenological monism, in which the Sufi may come face to face with God, became prominent in the 17th century through the reformist Naqshbandī *shaykh* Ahmed Sirhindī (1564-1624). Both ontological (*wujūdī*) and phenomenological (*shuhūdī*) monism are subsumed under the rubric of Sufism; however, it is worth establishing the theoretical, and thereby ethical, distinction between them.

At issue here is the interpretation of Islam’s seminal principle: *tawḥīd*, the unity of God. According to Chittick, the phrase *wahdat al-wujūd* itself has a history, originally designating ‘the oneness of the real *wudjud*’³⁷ (i.e. God) and later coming to signify a certain perspective on the whole of reality with varying interpretations. According to it, there is no ultimate separation between the Absolute (God) and everything in existence – hence the Persian Sufi phrase *hama ust*, ‘All is He’. Ibn al-ʿArabī therefore upholds the principle of interexistence: the distinction between subject and object is a cultural construct, not an absolute boundary. Reality, for ibn al-ʿArabī, encapsulates both the unity of God’s existence and the plurality of His knowledge – ‘the two principles through which he gives existence to the cosmos’³⁸ – so that when he speaks of “that which is other than God” (*mā siwā Allāh*), ‘he is using the term in a metaphorical sense... There is only one Being, one *wujūd*, even though we are justified in speaking of many “existent things” in order to address ourselves to the plurality that we perceive in the phenomenal world’³⁹. If *wujūd* is Reality, then everything other than it exists only in so far as it manifests the Real. Therefore, whilst not denying exoteric existence, ibn al-ʿArabī sees it as a mere expression of the esoteric Source, united or divided by an isthmus, or *barzakh*. From this viewpoint, the notion of definitive boundaries disintegrates into an infinite continuum emanating from that source.

The primacy of the esoteric in *wahdat al-wujūd*, which generated an alternative socio-political perspective, placed it distinctly at odds with Islamic orthodoxy. As such, a staunch guardian of

³⁶ Although there is no record of him using this exact phrase, the concept is attributed to him.

³⁷ William Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction*, (Oneworld, Oxford, 2000) p. 37

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 39

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 75

the latter, the Ḥanbalī jurist ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), attacked it fiercely, equating it with the heresies of *ḥulūl* (incarnation) and *ittiḥād* (unification). Later, Sirhindī also criticised the principle on the basis that Muslims were using it as a pretext to avoid observance of the *sharīʿa*. As even al-Ghazālī had hinted, belief in the cosmic unity of existence reduced the ritual conformance of the *sharīʿa* to mere arbitrary status. Sirhindī therefore distinguished between the existence of God and the world, and insisted that God could be witnessed (i.e. *shuhūd*) but not experienced (i.e. *wujūd*).

However, Sirhindī's effective denial of the noumenal realm must be seen in historical context. His Naqshbandī reformism was an attempt to forestall the amalgamation of Islam and Hinduism in 17th century India to which *waḥdat al-wujūd* contributed. If God alone existed, physical objects were no more than divine 'flashes' or 'appearances' which could be worshipped 'as manifestations of the divine will'⁴⁰, giving credence to Hindu beliefs. Since this would entail a descent into heterodoxy and polytheism (*shirk*), ibn al-ʿArabī's theosophy would have to be firmly subordinated to the *sharīʿa*. Phenomenological monism is therefore an exoteric system, maintaining a separation between God and man, while the esoteric ontological monism sees man as a constituent part of the one Reality. By according divine status to the human construct of the *sharīʿa*, Sirhindī equated non-adherence with non-belief. By contrast, the esoteric perspective prioritises *ḥaqīqa*, truth, over *sharīʿa*, law. For ibn al-ʿArabī, reality is the mirror through which an immanent God contemplates Himself; for Sirhindī, reality is the reflection of a transcendent God, not to be mistaken for the Original. Such differences have significant implications: Sirhindī's exoterism, although nominally Sufi, maintained the dominance of the *sharīʿa* and *ʿulamāʾ*, keeping Islam within rigid conservative boundaries and distinguishing Muslims from infidels on the basis of orthopraxy. Conversely, ibn al-ʿArabī's esoterism is simultaneously monotheistic and polytheistic, issuing from an unconscious realm that transcends all exoteric boundaries.

The alternative political philosophies of these viewpoints are self-evident, not least in the acceptance or rejection of the other. In light of this deep schism within Sufism, an important clarification is necessary. The term 'Sufism', henceforth, will refer to the ontological strand and

⁴⁰ Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, (Penguin, London, 2000) p. 275

the noumenal experiences thereof, and neither to the phenomenological strand nor the *ṭarīqa* institutions into which Sufism was later systematized.⁴¹ Sirhindī's approach has a clear parallel in Nietzsche's rejection of the notion of an inaccessible reality beyond sensible things, and therefore with postmodern relativist's denial of absolute truth. To what extent the proposed 'neo-Sufi' movement fuses Nietzschean scepticism with Akbarian esoterism remains to be seen.

To further illustrate the nature of ontological monism, we may examine the important metaphor of the mirror, which neatly symbolises the relation in Sufism between lover and Beloved. The Sufi lover desires to return to the Beloved, and he polishes "the mirror of his heart" in order to reflect the latter's radiance. Lover is therefore a mere reflection of Beloved, a visible manifestation of His existence. The closer he gets to the Beloved, the more perfectly he reflects Him, and is ultimately fused into complete Unity. The Sufi perfect man, *al-insān al-kāmil*, has reached the point where he reflects Him perfectly. This is, in fact, the return of the Beloved to Himself, exemplified in Corbin's Sufi quote: 'I am the mirror of thy face; through thine own eyes I look upon thy countenance'⁴². Thus the Sufi's being (*wujūd*) returns to its original unity (*waḥda*), thus reaffirming the principle of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

The mirror metaphor, like al-Junayd's water metaphor discussed below, reveals the equivalence between the medieval Sufi concept of God and the modern concept of the self as lacking intrinsic content. Just as the water takes on the colour of the container, so the mirror takes on the appearance of the viewer: both entail a greater Absence. God, the Real, is the mirror; the seeker is merely the image. In *fanā'*, therefore, the Sufi dissolves his ego into the greater Self of the mirror. Thus spoke the Sufi al-Biṣṭāmī: "You were my mirror; I have become the mirror."⁴³ Whether the Sufi can actually *become* the mirror, or merely see its perfection, is a question of *wujūdī* (ontological) or *shuhūdī* (phenomenological) monism respectively.

⁴¹ The *ṭarīqa* itself is a socio-political constellation, distinct from esoteric truth around which it is based, each with its own specific characteristics, rituals and symbols. For the modern poets, its hierarchical structure is undoubtedly an objectionable aspect of Sufism.

⁴² Henri Corbin, *The man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, quoted in Paul Davies, *Romanticism and Esoteric Tradition: Studies in Imagination* (Lindisfarne, New York, 1998) p. 45-6

⁴³ Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī, *Les Dits de Bistami*, tr. Abdelwahab Meddeb, (Fayard, France, 1989)

Sufism and Political Commitment: the case of al-Hallāj

As noted above, Sufism's esoteric orientation does not necessarily preclude the potential for political action. The notion of a total revolution transcends the categories of internal and external. In a modern context, therefore, rather than being merely an otherworldly escape from external concerns, Sufism could represent a means of transcending a shattered reality and a *furtherance* of political commitment. This thesis proposes that Sufi concepts might have been reconciled with modern thought to generate a neo-humanist philosophy, on both an individual and collective level. For example, the immanent nature of the Sufi deity – there are as many ways to God as human souls – is compatible with the democratic ideal. It is possible that the “neo-Sufi” development, after the failure of political ideologies, is a further expression of the search for truth, freedom and justice. To investigate this proposition requires consideration of the archetype of the radical Sufi mystic: al-Ḥallāj, who would become emblematic of the intellectual climate of 1960s Arabic poetry.

Mystic, poet, political dissident and ultimately martyr, al-Ḥallāj, who was revived as a literary persona by all three “neo-Sufi” poets, was executed in Baghdad following his infamous statement of union with God: *Anā al-Ḥaqq*, “I am the Truth”. His life can be seen as a journey towards the complete immersion of his individuality into the divine consciousness, culminating in the blasphemous references to God as synonymous with himself. The charge against him – *al-daʿwa ilā al-rubūbiyya*, or ‘usurpation of the supreme power of God’ – is revealing: al-Ḥallāj’s extreme esoterism clearly subverted the authority of the exoteric, institutional God and the attendant legal and political order. In placing himself above the jurisdiction of Prophet and Imam, al-Ḥallāj’s crime was to undermine Islamic law and thereby foundations of the state. From a modern viewpoint, his status as challenger of a corrupt theocratic order and champion of the oppressed, who was prepared to sacrifice himself for his beliefs, represents an inspirational model. Implicit within the unitive utterance “I am the Truth” is the idea that divinity is immanent within humanity, rather than transcendent. For the modern Pakistani poet Muḥammad Iqbāl, this utterance was a ‘bold affirmation in an undying phrase of the reality and permanence of the human ego in a profounder personality’.⁴⁴ In such a context, al-Ḥallāj becomes a modern hero

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World*, (Curzon, Richmond, 1999), p. 135

whose statements of devotion to ‘God’ can equally be interpreted as invocations of the integrity of the individual self. This anti-transcendentalism, contrary to the oppressive and dehumanising effect of religious dogma, opens the way for a dynamic conception of the human being as master of his own destiny. This dynamic, illuminated self, embodied by an idealised al-Ḥallāj, is a symbol of political and spiritual resistance with particular resonance for poets suffering as atomised individuals in opposition to overarching state ideologies.

Al-Ḥallāj’s ‘usurpation’ of the exoteric God freed him from the restraints of the external legal framework of the *sharī‘a*, thus allowing open-mindedness and innovation. This can be seen in his exhortation to perform the *ṭawāf* ‘round the *ka‘ba* of your heart’, discarding the exoteric action whilst retaining the esoteric meaning. The god within requires no holy texts or rituals, merely an inner truth which must be brought into the world. In his numinous experience al-Ḥallāj transcended religion altogether, and he was rejected even by his own Sufi brothers. To the modern poet, then, al-Ḥallāj’s appeal lies in his pursuit of truth regardless of the consequences.

From the esoteric perspective, there is no ultimate boundary between the self, the microcosm, and the world, the macrocosm. To perfect the self and live in truth therefore means likewise for the world, since no self exists in isolation. Individual and collective revolution become an indistinguishable whole: ‘God’ becomes synonymous with socio-political justice. As shown above, the Sufi state of *baqā’*, or prophetic consciousness, entails the very same principle. This is the premise behind al-Ḥallāj’s rejection of political reality. From this perspective, too, institutional religion and state ideology are equally misrepresentative, since they are both founded on rationalistic (*‘ilm*) principles that have relatively little penetration of truth. For the modern poet who despairs of both religious and secular dogma, the inner Sufi path of the self, exemplified by al-Ḥallāj represents the natural, perhaps inevitable alternative.

The revival of al-Ḥallāj, then, reveals a Sufi hero who combines spiritual distinction and social mission in one person, i.e. who unites words and actions. His life itself was supposedly divided between ascetic practices, such as solitary prayer and meditation, and social activities, such as preaching and giving counsel, thus achieving a balance between both existential aspects. According to Massignon, he was inclined towards extreme humility and renunciation of property, while ‘an overflowing faith incited him to preach in public those rules of life that he had found

beneficial for himself, [which he did] among his Muslim brothers and even among the idolaters, among the great as well as the lowly.’⁴⁵ From the esoteric viewpoint, when al-Ḥallāj’s personality was annihilated (*fanā’*) and became subsistent in the divine (*baqā’*), his identity, thoughts and actions became indistinguishable from those of God, since He alone exists, in accordance with *waḥdat al-wujūd*. As such, Massignon postulates that he was ‘interpreting directly the essential will of God, and participating in the divine nature, “transformed” in God,’⁴⁶ i.e., his actions in this state were by definition divine and perfect. Regardless of this moral absolutism, freedom and individuality are not destroyed but maintained in the Sufi doctrine of *baqā’*:

The effect of divine reality is not the destruction of the mystic’s personality, by crushing it with rites (*ṣabr, ṣaḥw*) or disengaging it through ecstatic intoxication (*sukr*); divine unity perfects it, consecrates it, exalts it, and makes it its own *free and living agent*.⁴⁷

The perfect man, in the Hallajian sense, lives in God, who augments his personality, sanctifies his every word and deed, sets him free from all external constraints and makes him responsible for his environment. In contrast to strict adherence to arbitrary, immutable rules supposedly laid down for all time by a remote divinity, this state entails individual freedom, and therefore responsibility. In Sufi terms, it is where the creation rejoins and embraces his Creator, and there flows an intimate, burning discourse between the Beloved and his heart. Al-Ḥallāj would have known the consequences of denying exoteric Islam, and his execution was therefore an ambiguous affair: death would mean final and permanent union with the Unknown, it would give his life meaning. It was this gruesome death that would become the focus of Arab poets’ existentialist concerns over a millennium later.

⁴⁵ Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, tr. & ed. Herbert Mason, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1994), p. 133

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 134

⁴⁷ Rahman, *op.cit*, p. 951

Sufism, Poetry and Post-Structuralist Theory

Sufi writing, or mystical poetry, can be conceived as an attempt to answer the ‘question of questions’, i.e. to express the meaning of existence. The mystical poem endeavours to symbolise the ever-expanding cosmos, or God’s universe, through the communicative medium of language. This cosmos, in both esoteric thought and contemporary science, is dynamic and interexistent: no thing is utterly static or isolated from all else. The same principles apply to the mystical poem: each component, as part of a unified whole, acquires meaning in relation to the others, thus reflecting the chaotic harmony of the cosmos. Ideally, the phonological, syntactical, semantic and rhythmical units all fuse to create a totality expressible only in that form – implying the breakdown of the standard categories of subject and object. The mystical poem thereby embraces genuine meaning as the existential microcosm, linking the specific to the universal.

However, this theoretically ideal poem will never be composed, since its linguistic constitution exiles it from absolute truth. This is something acknowledged both in post-structural theory and in classical Sufi poetry:

Neither words, nor any natural fact
can express this.⁴⁸

The perpetual gap between signifier and signified compels the mystical poet to employ an alternative language in which silence is the dominant motif: a kind of expressive implosion. This accounts for the inspired succinctness of ibn al-‘Arabī’s formula: *huwa lā huwa* (He / not He).⁴⁹ The Islamic *shahāda* – the expression of God’s unity or reality, *lā ilāha illā Allāh* – can also be viewed in this light, while the same pursuit of truth in European postmodernism accounts for the spiralling of artistic creation into the vortex of its own annihilation (*fanā’*).⁵⁰ The *shahāda* involves a negation or *fanā’* (‘no god’) and an affirmation or *baqā’* (‘but God’), revealing the fragile consistency between Sufi vision and Islamic belief. It is, in other words, a negation of

⁴⁸ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī, *The Essential Rumi*, tr. C. Barks & J. Moyne (Penguin, London, 1995) p. 10

⁴⁹ William Chittick, ‘Rumi and *Wahdat al-Wujud*’, in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi*, (Eleventh Giorgio Levi Della Vida Conference, University of California, Los Angeles, 1987,) p. 76

⁵⁰ John Cage’s silent musical composition, entitled “4’33”, is one example of postmodern *fanā’*.

non-existence – ‘no Reality’ – and an affirmation of existence – ‘but The Reality.’ For the Sufis, writes Schuon,

the *shahadah* comprises two meanings, depending on whether one has in mind transcendence or immanence: firstly, the truth that God alone is real, as opposed to the world which, being contingent, is illusory; then the truth that no existence can be situated outside God: that all exists “is not other than He” (*lā ghayruhu*), failing which, precisely the world would not exist.⁵¹

In Sufi terms, then, the *shahāda* means ‘There is no Absolute, but The Absolute’. ‘God’ is merely a name, which cannot convey direct meaning. Sufism entails an entirely different conception of God – as latent within man, or ‘closer than his jugular vein’ (Qur’ān 50:16) – based on the unity of existence. From this perspective, the *shahāda* is merely a one-line Sufi poem defining the mystic’s belief. The Sufi *dhikr*, the ritual repetition of this phrase to achieve an ecstatic state, is in effect a poetry recital for which the audience is the Absolute Himself.

The intimate connection between Sufism and poetry revolves around this notion of *tawḥīd*. For the Sufi, this unity entails the syzygy of exoteric and esoteric domains, what is seen and Unseen. In his exoteric state, i.e. ego-consciousness, man is separated from God; the mystic’s goal is union with the esoteric divinity. Divine union synthesizes polar opposites: God is simultaneously both One and Many, just as white light diffracts into the spectrum whilst remaining the same light. The Sufi conceives of reality through these reciprocal aspects, which are two sides of the same coin, and in mystical union he sees or embodies their unity. Ibn al-‘Arabī, for example, ‘asserts both the oneness of God *wudjūd* [sic] and the manyness of His knowledge, the unity of His Essence and the multiplicity of His names...’⁵² Sufism emphasizes the immanent alongside the transcendent nature of God, or His esoteric in complement to His exoteric aspect. The esoteric is the domain of the heart – union and love, two central themes in Sufi poetry – while the exoteric is that of the mind – reason and logic. Poetry, with its intoxicating subversion of linguistic norms, is the natural vehicle to convey the experience of the esoteric, through which the Sufi strives for perfect selfhood. The Sufi opens himself to ‘effusions of divine love’, which can be ‘so overwhelming that they lose their powers of rational discernment and tend to express

⁵¹ Frithjof Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, (Evergreen, Lahore, 1985), pp.161-2

⁵² Chittick, ‘Rumi and *Wahdat al-Wujūd*’, p. 77

themselves in ecstatic and paradoxical language.⁵³ Super-rational experiences – such as the rapture of Sufi union – necessitate the super-rational language of poetry. Such poetry, the attempt to name divine reality, has no logical endpoint, since to the intoxicated Sufi all things are a reflection of God.

Given its esoteric nature, the experience of (re-)union with the Absolute transcends language. When things are returned to and unified with their source, explicit communication is no longer necessary or desired, since the linguistic medium exiles its speaker from truth. Words, for both Sufis and post-structuralists, are a veil to truth: esoteric reality is known only through direct experience, which is beyond description. The mystical experience and its poetic expression are two parallel but never contiguous lines, separated by the gap between name and reality. Hence the metaphorical and/or metonymical nature of Sufi discourse: its endlessly varied imagery and symbolism are an attempt to bridge this gap. In this sense, Sufi poetry attempts the impossible: to reveal the invisible, or to bring order to chaos.

Understanding Sufi poetry therefore hinges on awareness of the relationship between language and existence, between word and essence. The fundamental significance of the word in Abrahamic monotheism is beyond doubt: the Torah and Gospel attest to linguistic originality – ‘In the beginning was the Word’ – while Islam considers the Qur’ānic text a sacred entity revealed by God in Arabic for all time. Against such “logocentricity” the Sufi experience would maintain the inexpressible nature of God’s essence. However, a parallel can be drawn between the simultaneous unity and multiplicity of the Divine and the concept of language as the endless diffraction of the primary Word or Logos, symbol of esoteric divinity. Through this emanatory process the Sufi may represent his experience of God:

Origin/Word (esoteric) → existence/language (exoteric).

The Word’s descent into flesh is the evolution of man from divine to human, from the womb to life, from esoteric to exoteric. The way of the Sufi, the mystical return to Origin, is a reintegration of this original psychic split.

⁵³ Chittick, *Sufism*, p. 35

The restless and paradoxical multiplicity of the Absolute Oneness is reflected in the myriad of metaphors (*majāz*) in Sufi discourse. Light is one such metaphor: pure white light descends through the prism into infinite colours, as in Ibn al-^cArabi's concept of *al-wāḥid al-kathīr* ('plural singular'). In accord with the Sufi al-Junayd's (d.910) statement that "The water takes on the colour of the container,"⁵⁴ modern physics instructs that humans see not the thing itself, but merely the light it reflects. Such is the relationship between man and God in Sufism. As Chittick puts it: 'The universe is nothing but the outward manifestation of the innate properties of *wujūd* [existence], just as colours, forms, and shapes are nothing but the outward manifestations of light... the multiplicity of colours does not negate the oneness of light. Red and blue have no existence of their own... their existence is only a mode of light's existence.'⁵⁵ Likewise, in mystical writing, language, which is exiled from esoteric reality, exemplifies a process of abstraction, *fanā'*, in order to symbolise it, or to become the Singular in plural form:

Only love.

Only the holder the flag fits into,
and wind. No flag.⁵⁶

Metaphor, then, is the umbilical link between poetry and Sufism, between visible and invisible. It is the prism, the point of transformation, or the conceptual isthmus between esoteric meaning and exoteric image. At this point dimensionality implodes and writing attains a zero-degree. As such, the metaphor is analogous to the Sufi concept of the *barzakh*, an intersection of modes of consciousness which forms the fulcrum of the unitive perspective. The Sufi al-Niffarī (d.c.976) calls it 'the tomb of reason and the cemetery of things,'⁵⁷ since beyond it lies the esoteric. Metaphor unites image and meaning; the Sufi *barzakh* unites man and God. The emptiness of linguistic signifiers implies that "literal" language is impossible and that conscious use of metaphor must be the truest form of expression. Indeed, both mysticism and poetic language are premised on the principle of *simultaneity*: 'that a thing not only can be both itself and not itself

⁵⁴ The water represents the Divine essence, and the container represents man, a potential truth. Water entails transparency, an abstraction of colour. Transparency of the container, if achieved, is *fana'*, the annihilation of the ego, when any qualitative distinction between the water and the container – God and man – disappears.

⁵⁵ Chittick, 'Rumi and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*', p. 76

⁵⁶ al-Rūmī, op.cit., p. 29

⁵⁷ Adonis, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, (Saqi, London, 1990), p. 62

but is so in the nature of things.’⁵⁸ Contrary to Aristotelian logic and Cartesian rationality, God is simultaneously present and absent, near and far, everything and nothing, united by the *barzakh*. The ‘secret’ of mystical unity is precisely this simultaneity: that the self is at the same time the other, that the whole requires the presence of both constituent elements, God and man, unconscious and conscious. The simultaneity principle is, in this sense, the essence of mysticism.

The Sufi poet understands the fundamental illogicality of metaphor, which equates two ostensibly different things. As Adonis puts it: ‘metaphor is an effective refusal of the Aristotelian logic which denies that a thing can be both itself and not itself at the same time – on the contrary, metaphor affirms precisely that, in the simplest of terms... In many forms of poetry this principle can be witnessed in operation, when the ornamental function of metaphor gives way to the cognitive.’⁵⁹ Language, like science, cannot circumscribe an infinite existence of which it is itself a part. Conceived as a ‘sacred grammar’, Existence (like Heidegger’s *Dasein*) is the only subject – an infinitive, intransitive verb, ‘to be’ – and all existent things are its predicate. Sufi poetry, then, employs metaphor in full, self-ironic awareness of its absurd undertaking: the exoteric act of communication betrays esoteric experience. Although even metaphor is unable to convey true meaning, it remains the best means available. Frithjof Schuon argues that genuine identity between word and concept is not only impossible but unnecessary, since otherwise all symbolism would become obsolete.⁶⁰ Paradoxically, the vitality of poetry depends on its very exile from truth.

An illustration of such principles can be found in the poetry of Rūmī, which contains expressions that ‘seem to contradict all logic, and yet make perfect sense in the context of a poem,’⁶¹ and confirm that “the metaphor is the bridge toward Truth”⁶². His poetry is described as ‘an organic unity, like that of a tree with ever new branches, leaves, blossoms, and fruits, all of which, different as they may look, grow out of one deep root and constitute an indivisible unity.’⁶³ Rumi’s poetic experience shifts the emphasis from the ‘content’ of the words themselves towards their actual syntactic structure and its allegorical nature. This is a meta-verbal expression: an

⁵⁸ Davies, op.cit., p. 175

⁵⁹ Adonis, *al-Ṣūfiyya wa al-Sūryāliyya*, (Dār al-Sāqī, Beirut, 1995), pp. 178-9

⁶⁰ Schuon, op.cit, p. 157

⁶¹ Annemarie Schimmel, ‘Mawlana Rumi: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow’, in *Poetry & Mysticism in Islam*, p.12

⁶² Ibid, p.13

⁶³ Ibid, p.16

alchemical fusion of words, images, sounds creates the intoxicating product, which is more than the sum of its parts. The meaning is distilled *between* the linguistic components and themselves, impervious to any faithful translation, rational analysis or meaningful unpacking.

Just as in the Sufi tradition that there are as many ways to God as there are human souls, so there are infinite ways to express the Absolute. To symbolise the infinite existence of God, poetic expression must be constantly revitalised. To remain true to the vision, therefore, form undergoes an irrevocable explosion, as Rūmī hints: “no room for form with love this strong.” It must attune to the perpetual flux of existence, in keeping with the Taoist formula: ‘change is the sole unchanging existent.’⁶⁴

The foregoing conception of the mystical poem bears a striking correspondence to the later Barthes’ meta-linguistic ‘text of bliss’, which ‘*supersedes* grammatical attitudes: it is the undifferentiated eye which an excessive author... describes: “The eye by which I see God is the same eye by which He sees me”.’⁶⁵ Likewise, in ontological monism, the human self is merely part of the Absolute, whilst also separate from it. The phoneme *eye/I* is semantically multiple in both English and Arabic: ‘*Ayn* means both ‘eye’ and ‘source’, thereby connoting not just vision, but the original source of existence. Ibn al-‘Arabī exploits this semantic overlap to articulate his concept of the all-Seeing Eye, similar to Blake’s ‘eye of vision’. As ‘God’, in this sense, is the only source and subject in this interexistent universe, the all-Seeing Eye is also the all-Seeing I. He also uses the term ‘*ayn*’ in its dual form, ‘*aynān*’, to denote the two sides of reality, esoteric and exoteric. Each human has two eyes, the outer and the inner, with which to find God: the perfect man exemplifies a balance between the two.⁶⁶ The same duality underscores Barthes’ differentiation between ‘texts of pleasure’ and ‘texts of bliss’:

‘Pleasure can be expressed in words, bliss cannot. Bliss is unspeakable, inter-dicted. I refer to Lacan (“What one must bear in mind is that bliss is forbidden to the speaker, as such, or else that it cannot be spoken except *between the lines*...”) [emphasis added] and to Leclair (“...Whoever speaks, by speaking denies bliss, or correlatively, whoever experiences bliss causes the letter – and all possible speech – to collapse in the absolute degree of the annihilation he is celebrating”). With the writer of bliss (and his

⁶⁴ Davies, *op.cit.*, p.43

⁶⁵ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, tr. Richard Miller (Hill and Wang, New York, 1975), pp. 16-17

⁶⁶ J. Hunwick, ‘*Taşawwuf*’, *EI*, vol. 10, p. 328

reader) begins the untenable text, the impossible text. This text is outside pleasure, outside criticism, *unless it is reached through another text of bliss*: you cannot speak “on” such a text, you can only speak “in” it, *in its fashion*, enter into a desperate plagiarism, hysterically affirm the void of bliss.⁶⁷

In the text of bliss, and its socio-political ramifications, lies the intersection between Sufism and post-structuralism. In both cases, speech (exoteric) denies bliss (esoteric) and implicitly legitimises the prevalent order. Where Barthes distinguishes “on” and “in”, the Sufi declares his experience of *fanā*’ – the “void of bliss” – to be inexpressible. The uniqueness of the esoteric experience corresponds to the imperviousness of the text of bliss. Further, both the Sufi tradition and post-structuralist theory inhere the concept of permanent incompleteness: both *al-insān al-kāmil* and the text of bliss reflect the infinitely-expanding nature of the cosmos.

Post-structuralist theory deconstructs the received notion of ‘reality’ as premised on a system of empty signs. Sufi thought, likewise, undermines and invalidates external reality’s claim to truth, whilst maintaining the agency of the noumenal realm. Beyond the *barzakh*, language and the illusory selfhood it substantiates, are dissolved. Mystical poetry involves an exponential abstraction, or singularity, to reach this degree-zero point. As al-Niffarī says: “Expression narrows as vision broadens”⁶⁸: at the *barzakh* materiality implodes and the poet acquires a ‘hypostatic dimension’ of creativity, taking on all dimensions and none. The mutual exclusivity of esoteric and linguistic experiences reveals the logic behind practises such as Eastern meditation and silent *dhikr*. Sufi poetry, by virtue of its linguistic constitution, is deconstructable, but the Sufi *experience* is not. The closest language gets to this experience is in its original command, ‘Be’, which Elemire Zolla claims is the only word that can denote static unity: ‘Be in itself and by itself in the infinitive tense denotes timelessness: the One.’⁶⁹ However, the true mystical conversation is a silent one – Rūmī observes that ‘When the lips are silent, the heart has a hundred tongues.’⁷⁰ With the complete annihilation of language, divine speech comes into its own and words become synonymous with nature.

⁶⁷ Barthes, op.cit., pp. 21-2

⁶⁸ Adonis, *Kitāb al-Tahawwulāt fī Aqālim al-Nahār wa al-Layl*, (Dar al-‘Awda, Beirut, 1965) p. 9

⁶⁹ Davies, op.cit., p. 45

⁷⁰ Lynn Wilcox, *Sufism and Psychology*, (Abjad, Chicago, 1995), p. 110

Like esoteric writing, Barthes' text of bliss 'imposes a state of loss... unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions [and] brings to a crisis his relation with language'⁷¹, one that effects an 'abrupt loss of sociality'.⁷² It partakes in the 'destruction' of culture, whereby the reader 'enjoys the consistency of selfhood (that is his pleasure) and seeks its loss (that is his bliss)'.⁷³ Similarly, the esoteric text is inaccessible to external modes of enquiry, which it subverts. Furthermore, just as the Sufi journey dismantles the construct of 'reality' and fuses opposites, the post-structuralist text of bliss 'destroys utterly, *to the point of contradiction*, its own discursive category, its sociolinguistic reference (its "genre")... [and can even] attack the canonical structures of the language itself.'⁷⁴ The contradictions are neutralised at a point beyond rationality, i.e. in *fana*', bliss, the 'zero of the signified', the vortex into which culture is swallowed. Barthes and Derrida delight in the disfiguration of language just as the classical Sufi poets did before them. Sufi writing, then, is also a non-genre, a language of bliss, or silence. In the esoteric experience, the superficially contradictory belies a profound inner coherence: Sufism teaches one not to be a Sufi.

The poem, as defined above, is a semantic ecosystem expressing the true relationship between humanity and Existence. Enlightenment rationalism posits man as the existential subject. By contrast, the esoteric perspective of *wahdat al-wujūd*, based on the principle of interexistence, restores Nature to the centre, although it is simultaneously within man. In grammatical terms, then, man can only be the predicate, never the subject. We do not speak; we are spoken. Since existence has no outer limit – the universe, like the self, is a constantly expanding totality – the poem can never be static, finished or self-enclosed. It must always remain open and figurative, since the categorical or 'complete' utterance sets artificial borders, and therefore engenders ideology. From this perspective, in order to maintain the correspondence between language and cosmos, the poem should represent a beginning, a question, rather than an end or answer.

The ethical and political ramifications of this perspective, analogous to Kristeva's theory of the semiotic, are considerable.⁷⁵ Like metaphor, the semiotic is anti-Aristotelian: it is language's

⁷¹ Barthes, *op.cit.*, p.14

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.39

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.14

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.31

⁷⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1984)

‘other’, but at the same time intimately connected to it. When an infant (literally: ‘speechless’) enters the symbolic order of language, its pattern of behavioural forces is suppressed into the unconscious. However, this suppressed ‘semiotic’ remains discernible not just in language’s tone, and rhythm, but also its ‘contradiction, meaninglessness, disruption, silence and absence.’⁷⁶ This semiotic, then, is the esoteric ‘language of silence’: the antithesis of the explicit signification. The Sufi experience is a transcendence of the very same symbolic order that is undermined by the semiotic ‘meta-language’, contrary to language in the sense of ‘meanings’ attached to words. Both the semiotic and the esoteric experiences imply that a word can simultaneously be itself and its other; both, therefore, threaten and disrupt the hegemonic discourses that are founded on static identification of word and meaning.

Such methods of articulation, in other words, are utterly at variance with transcendental signification: they annihilate any alleged meaning of the linguistic sign. Language undergoes *fanā*: it becomes de-rationalised and decentred, there is an implosion of socially constructed meanings towards fluidity, plurality, precariousness and absence. The deconstruction of binary oppositions into a unified whole has seismic ramifications for the society predicated on such constructs: the illusion of ‘logocentricity’ can be exposed and replaced by a new order. Such texts constantly create their own parameters (in the poem’s case, its form); they are simultaneously uncertain and visionary, and conventional social and ethical principles cease to have meaning. Sufi poetry, then, through its reconciliation of outer signifier and inner sense, may function as a deconstructive text, challenging the arbitrary foundations of the exoteric order.

Through this ascent from culture to nature, from the mass distortions of ideology to the integrated truth of the individual, Sufi poetry effectively deconstructs and reassembles the human subject. Its sheer subjectivity denies the possibility of a collective Answer to man’s spiritual aspirations, the seed of political ideology and religious orthodoxy. Likewise, by revealing the incomplete nature of human knowledge, it undercuts science’s claim to objective truth. For the Sufi, truth comes through the unitive experience, whereby logical oppositions/complementarities are resolved and the *barzakh* between the human and the sacred is bridged. However, the seeker cannot know the truth; only the truth can know the seeker, and thereby itself.

⁷⁶ Terry Eagleton, *An Introduction to Literary Theory*, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1983), p. 162

Sufism, like poststructuralism, is predicated on the unreality or absence of the human subject. The Sufi is therefore a sceptic: he 'questions all received truth, since reliance on such a truth is a turning away from God.'⁷⁷ Since ontological monism removes the theoretical boundary between the self and the world, the exemplary Sufi, *al-insān al-kāmil*, must strive to perfect both inner and outer reality. He must be committed to both personal and political truth, since these cannot be ultimately distinguished. Establishing whether – and if so, how and why – such a conflation influenced modern Arab poets is also among the objectives of this thesis.

The foregoing analysis reveals some points of convergence between medieval Sufi and recent European ideas, particularly in the area of post-structuralism, thus hinting at their deeper identity. The eventual re-emergence of Western thought from the conceptual straitjacket of rationality in postmodernity has facilitated the return of religious motifs. The task, therefore, is to establish the extent to which this generation, as heirs to both the Arab-Islamic heritage and modern European thought, utilized Sufi and post-modern ideas simultaneously as an integrated mode of expression characterised by irrationality, incompleteness and structural fluidity.

⁷⁷ Ewing, *op.cit.*, p. 263

Sufism and the Self

i) A Modern Psychological Approach

In Sufi terms, the human subject, or ego, is a deficient, split being, who is separated – *exiled* – from God. It is a cultural construct, an illusory self, and only through *fanā'*, its annihilation, can Divine love be fulfilled. The notion that the ego represents a discrete, autonomous self, possessing free will and independence, can be seen as an ideology veiling the infinite truth of the self, and therefore containing the potential for external oppression. By this logic, overcoming ego-consciousness and replacing it with a fuller self is the path towards emancipation, the prerequisite for a new life of truth. This state, which the Sufis call *baqā'*, is the real selfhood, an individuality that incorporates the whole of existence. In this subversion of the socially constructed self, and the collective order that substantiates it, lies the revolutionary potential of Sufism. Moreover, since from this perspective there is no definitive boundary between self and world, this subversion must be effected on both a personal and a cosmic level.

In Europe, Freud's revolutionary decentring of the human subject opened the way towards an exploration of the unconscious mind, and thereby to the possibility of a psychoanalytic approach to the Sufi experience. Following Freud, Lacan's proposal that the subject is split by its entry into the symbolic order and thereby alienated from its own desire forms the very premise of the Sufi experience, which effectively reverses the psychological progression from need-based input towards an order in which signs shape perception. For Lacan, the source of existential alienation lies in the human being's internalisation of language and culture: it has become an exoteric being. To overcome this disjunction, or exile from the 'lost real' of organic being, entails traversing the perpetual gap between the organism and the signifying subject – i.e. the Sufi *barzakh* – back to esoteric reality, which is ostensibly the mystic's aim. Likewise, the alienated modern individual would also attempt to transcend the exile of exoteric consciousness towards complete selfhood. This extra-linguistic 'real' is the same 'semiotic' that, according to Kristeva, unconsciously informs human signification, particularly in creative endeavours such as poetry, which can be seen as an expression of the desire for re-unification with it.

However, the psychologist Jung, who has been described as ‘one of the first psychotherapists to recognise the possibility of a fruitful relationship between Western and Eastern concepts of the mind,’⁷⁸ seems the closest European thinker to classical Sufism. The undeniable centrality of the ‘religious experience’ in Jungian thought⁷⁹ exposed him to frequent accusations of mysticism, unacceptable at a time when scientism and reductionism were in the ascendancy.⁸⁰ However, times have changed, and neo-Sufism, if anything, is itself a part of this change. The undeniable and valuable affinity between Sufi mysticism and Jungian thought can be summarised as follows⁸¹:

- Jung’s emphasis on the primacy of the inner experience (*al-bāṭin*) and psychic reality (*al-Ḥaqq*), which is prior to physical form. For Jung, the human psyche, or self, is the fundamental point of reference and womb of all arts and sciences. For the Sufis, an introjected concept of God held the same status.
- His view that the essence of religion is an individual numinous experience (cf. *ru’ya*), as opposed to the social institution of a ‘creed’ or collective faith, and the belief in the absolute integrity of this subjective religious event.
- His recognition of the precedence of the unconscious or esoteric mind, and the resultant inversion of subject-object relations.
- His theory of an amplified selfhood (*baqā’*) of which the conscious ego is merely a relatively insignificant component, and which is the product of a long process of self-transformation or ‘individuation’ (*fanā’* and *baqā’*).

⁷⁸ Clarke, *op.cit.*, p. 3. He also quotes Mokusen Miyuki: “C.G.Jung’s Analytical Psychology has provided the West with the first meaningful avenue to approach Buddhism and other Asian religious experience.”

⁷⁹ The term “Jungian thought” rather than “psychology” is used here, since it incorporates his investigations into alchemy and Eastern philosophy, which are relevant here, and for which he uses the same terminology. As Jung was aware, there is an inescapable circularity in any theory of the self, since the psyche is both the subject and object of such a theory. He was very much aware that the concept of “the unconscious” (like the Sufi concept of God) could never be more than a hypothetical proposition which was observable merely in its secondary effects rather than itself. He is therefore mindful of the limits of his approach, as of any other: “Psychology can do nothing towards the elucidation of this colourful imagery except bring together materials for comparison and offer a terminology for its discussion.” – *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, (Routledge, London, 2001), p. 168

⁸⁰ For his part, Jung was adamant that his method is empirical and based on experience rather than speculation. The accusation of mysticism is premised on the assumption that this is inherently wrong, which itself only makes sense from a purely rational perspective. However, Jungian thought, like Sufism, does not deny the self-evident validity of the rational perspective, but merely points out that it is incapable of circumscribing a very large part of human experience, in particular that part which pertains to self-knowledge and individuation. At the same time, this supposedly “mystical” inclination in Jungian psychology is precisely what makes it appropriate to the analysis of the Sufi and “neo-Sufi” experiences.

⁸¹ Clarke, *op.cit.*, pp. 5-6

- His efforts to resolve the “*complexio oppositorum*” between mind and matter, or between complementary opposites within the psyche, in order to achieve psychic wholeness.
- His espousal of the super-rational and paradoxical as an individualistic counterbalance to the rational function (*‘ilm*) that maintains the collective order.
- His conception of the inner microcosm of the psyche and the outer macrocosm of the world, and their essential unity.
- His idea that at the most profound level humanity shares a common psychological structure, which exists independently within its simultaneous differences.
- His ability to distance himself from his cultural, historical and intellectual roots and recognise the essentially plural nature of human knowledge, experience and expression, whilst simultaneously emphasizing their underlying unity (*waḥdat al-wujūd, al-wāḥid al-kathīr*, the simultaneity principle).
- His constant engagement with the other, the unknown, and the esoteric aspects of both Western and Eastern thought. For him, as for the Sufis, the schism of the world was not geographical (East/West) but psychic (unconscious/conscious, or esoteric/exoteric).
- The parallel between the Sufi concept of God and the ‘indefinitely large hinterland’ of the Jungian unconscious. Like the Sufi God, this unconscious is the active subject which is visible not in itself, but merely in its secondary effects. For both it can be said that the ego, which Jung compares to an island in an ocean, is ‘subordinated to, or contained in, a superordinated self as a centre of the total, illimitable and indefinable psychic personality.’⁸² Fundamentally, Jung is in agreement with the Sufi premise of essential identity between God and man, in contrast to the exoteric transcendent view.

These points, *inter alia*, regardless of their objective truth-value, validate the proposition that Jung’s phenomenology of the self, which he himself realised to be as arbitrary and relative as any other science, provides the most appropriate methodological and terminological framework through which to analyse the Sufi experience, and hence its “neo-Sufi” successor. This can be summed up in his statement that: ‘there is only *one* Earth and *one* mankind, East and West cannot rend humanity into two different halves. Psychic reality still exists in its original oneness, and

⁸² C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1938), pp. 47-8

awaits man's advance to a level of consciousness [*al-insān al-kāmil*] where he no longer believes in the one part and denies the other, but recognizes both as constituent elements of the psyche.'⁸³

ii) Sufism, Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious

Jung hypothesizes the existence of a 'collective unconscious' consisting of myth-forming structural elements – archetypes – in the human psyche. The archetype is an involuntary manifestation of unconscious processes whose existence and meaning can only be inferred. It is essentially 'an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear.'⁸⁴ This is tantamount to al-Junayd's above-quoted statement: "The water takes on the colour of the container".⁸⁵ Like the water, the archetype is a 'hypothetical and irrepresentable model' that lacks intrinsic content, assuming definite form only in projection, i.e. metaphorically. As such, the term 'archetype' is merely a translation of inexpressible elements into another metaphorical language, as is the case with Sufi poetry.

Jung deems archetypes to be 'complexes of experience that come upon us like fate...'⁸⁶ As the constitutive elements of the collective unconscious, they embody simultaneity, i.e. logical opposites in their still undifferentiated state. Their autonomy means they cannot be integrated purely rationally, but through a dialectical procedure, of which the Sufi dialogue between man and God is an example. Like the Sufi God, the collective unconscious has absolute, universal status: it is a 'sheer objectivity' in which the self becomes coterminous with the world.⁸⁷ The activation of an archetype allegedly produces 'a conflict of pathological dimensions, [i.e.], a neurosis'⁸⁸, whereby conscious will is subordinated to the implementation of the archetypal drive.

Three closely interrelated archetypes merit discussion here: rebirth, the perfect man, and the child. Historically, the universal idea of rebirth, which is a psychic rather than externally tangible

⁸³ Jung, *Collected Works* 8, p. 682, quoted in Clarke, op.cit, p. 189

⁸⁴ C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, (Routledge, London, 1990), p. 5

⁸⁵ Jung himself also points out that 'water is the commonest symbol for the unconscious... Water is the "valley spirit", the water dragon of Tao, whose nature resembles water – a yang embraced in the yin. Psychologically, therefore, water means that the spirit has become unconscious...' This was no doubt the case with al-Junayd.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 30

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 153

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 48

reality, has been enacted both through institutionalized religious rituals (exoterically) and through inner transformation (esoterically). Jung posits Nietzsche's Noontide Vision, as well as mystical experiences, as an example of the latter: his Dionysian experience promised psychic resurrection. Exoteric renewal has been concretized in myths of the death and rebirth of a god-hero, such as the Phoenician deities Adonis and Tammūz, through which the initiate experiences the permanence and continuity of life, and maintains hope of immortality. This archetype was conspicuously active from the 1930s onwards, when the "neo-Sufi" generation grew up: the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP) was strongly identified with the Tammūz myth, while the rise of *Ḥizb al-Ba'ath*, "The Party of Resurrection", revealed the Arab nation's yearning for a new beginning.

The Sufi concept of *al-insān al-kāmil*, the perfect or complete man, like the Chinese *chen-yen*, is comparable to the alchemists' complete man, or "second Adam", who represents 'the glorified, incorruptible body of resurrection.'⁸⁹ The second Adam, or Anthropos archetype, suggests a link between beginning (pre-conscious) and end (post-conscious), completing the circle of human development. This provides the basis for related concepts, such as the *qutb* ("axis" or "pole") in Sufism, the *mahdī* and hidden imam in Shī'ism, as well as Nietzsche's *Überman*. As Jung notes, 'the primordial being becomes the distant goal of man's self-development'⁹⁰: future man is also the original man. But future man has made a choice: he is the maker of his own fate. In his perfect consciousness, he is simultaneously part of the world and carries the world in himself. His identity is supra-personal. He is the conscious and the unconscious, the microcosm and the macrocosm, which are one indivisible unity. He is both unique and universal, the axial point of the cosmos in which the original chaos resides. It follows that whatever is wrong with the world is, by that same token, wrong in the psyche of man. To understand the psyche, therefore, requires contemplation of the whole world. Jung elucidates the dialectical unitive relationship between self and world which entails simultaneous identity and difference:

⁸⁹ Jung, *Psychology*, p. 111. He later notes that 'the great problem and concern of philosophical alchemy was the same as underlies the psychology of the unconscious, namely individuation, the integration of the self.' *Archetypes*, p. 383

⁹⁰ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 175

As an individual phenomenon, the self is “smaller than small”; as the equivalent of the cosmos it is “bigger than big”. The self, regarded as the counter-pole of the world, its “absolutely other”, is the *sine qua non* of all empirical knowledge and consciousness of subject and object.⁹¹

Connected to the Anthropos archetype is that of the child, which likewise represents ‘beginning and end, an initial and terminal creature... Psychologically speaking, this means that the “child” symbolizes the pre-conscious and post-conscious essence of man... In this idea the all-embracing nature of psychic wholeness is expressed.’⁹² The child has a redemptive significance: it is ‘a symbol which unites the opposites; a mediator, a bringer of healing, that is, one who makes whole... a wholeness which embraces the very depths of Nature.’⁹³

Childhood is a *unitive* state prior to the split between the organic self and the symbolic order. This is the psychological backdrop to the Sufi state of *tawakkul*, total reliance on God. If the child is ‘born out of the womb of the unconscious,’ then *tawakkul* effectively reverses the process of psychological development from the illusory autonomy of the ego to a point equivalent to presence in the maternal womb. At this fleeting moment, separation is dissolved in the ‘perpetual presence’⁹⁴ and the Sufi becomes, in al-Ghazālī’s words, ‘like a corpse in the hands of the corpse-washer’.⁹⁵, i.e. restored to unconsciousness. Therefore, in *tawakkul*, a kind of “death” equivalent to *fanā*, the psychic unity and security of the original womb are both re-established. Psychologically, the attraction of such a state to the alienated subject is clear: ‘there are no problems without consciousness... That, no doubt, is also why in Paradise it was the tree of knowledge which bore such fateful fruit.’⁹⁶

The child archetype also entails *futurity*: as a symbol of the creative union of opposites, it points forward to an as yet unattained goal, namely individuation. The childhood motif anticipates ‘the figure that comes from the synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements in the personality’: i.e. the perfect man.⁹⁷ Moreover, the synthesis between self and other generates truth and

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 171

⁹² Ibid, p. 178

⁹³ Ibid, p. 170

⁹⁴ Leonard Lewisohn, ‘Tawakkul’, *EI*, vol 10, p. 377

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 378

⁹⁶ Jung, *Modern Man*, p. 100

⁹⁷ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 164

meaning in the form of an irrational third element or by-product such as the dream or the work of art.

iii) Sufism and Individuation

As is now clear, these archetypes are all cognate and ultimately interchangeable expressions of inner transformation and rebirth, i.e. *individuation*, ‘the process by which a person becomes a psychological “in-dividual”, that is, a separate, indivisible unity or “whole”’.⁹⁸ This process subordinates the many to the One, and its goal is psychic wholeness through the synthesis of the self. The Sufi dialectic of *fanā’* and *baqā’* – abstraction (*tajrīd*) to a point prior to any split in identity, and rebirth into a new, fortified selfhood – is a psychological equivalent, analogous to complete integration of conscious and unconscious. This explains the Sufi directive to ‘die in order to live’. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theory of ontological monism itself is an example of Sufi individuation, whereby multiplicity is reconciled into unity. Jung’s own description of individuation is highly reminiscent of Sufi discourse:

... it reveals our relationship to that inner friend of the soul into whom Nature herself would like to change us – that other person who we also are and yet can never attain to completely. We are that pair of Dioscuri, one of whom is mortal and the other immortal, and who, though always together, can never be made completely one... [It is] the transformation of what is mortal... into what is immortal.⁹⁹

Individuation is none other than a technical term for that most ancient of directives: to know the self. And the process of *self-knowledge* involves an often painful meeting with the ‘shadow’. Between the hammer and anvil of conscious and unconscious, psychic balance is forged into an indestructible whole. Jung’s description of this meeting recalls the Sufi union with God in which opposites are fused, producing the simultaneity principle:

[It is] a boundless expanse full of unprecedented uncertainty, with apparently no inside and outside, no above and below, no here and there, no mine and thine, no good and bad. It is the world of water, where

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 275

⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 130-4

all life floats in suspension... where I am indivisibly this *and* that; where I experience the other in myself and the other-than-myself experiences me.¹⁰⁰

As hinted above, the individuation process is inherently creative, and produces something qualitatively new and different. The meeting of opposites creates a by-product, like the hatching of an egg. Achieving selfhood stimulates innovation (*bidʿ*) and imagination (*khayāl*), the alchemical by-products of fusion, expressed in art, dreams, and other irrational phenomena.

iv) The Circle and the Fall

How can the internal union of individuation be externally represented? The perfect symbol of wholeness is the circle. Jung quotes St. Augustine: “God is a infinite circle (or sphere) whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere.”¹⁰¹ This is an expression of the divine in man, or the infinite nature of the individual self, since it is a part of “the unconscious”. The circle is simultaneously the symbol of perfect meaning and meaninglessness, of constant (non-)arrival at the destination, of perfection through return to the origin, of madness and mesmeric entrapment. The Mevlevi “whirling dervish” is a Sufi expression of the eternal, symbolising the endless cycle of existence: death and rebirth. As Barrett observes, ‘the circle is the pure archetypal form for the eternal: “I saw Eternity the other night,” says the English poet Vaughan, “Like a great ring of pure and endless light.” The idea of the Eternal Return thus expresses, as Unamuno has pointed out, Nietzsche’s own aspirations toward eternal and immortal life.’¹⁰²

For Jung, the circle is the natural symbol of the *mandala*¹⁰³, a Sanskrit word representing the expression of a yogin’s final transformation into the divine all-consciousness, just as in Sufi *baqāʿ*. In Jungian psychology, the *mandala*, which is ‘an involuntary confession of a peculiar mental condition,’ is elevated to a universal archetype, articulated in various recurring symbols according to circumstance (ring, cross, eye, egg, sun, flower, wheel, city, etc). The circular image

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 21-2

¹⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 324-5, quoted from Baumgartner: “Deus est figura intellectualis, cujus centrum est ubique, circumferential vero nusquam.”

¹⁰² Barrett, op.cit., p. 194

¹⁰³ Unsurprisingly, the *mandala* is a very common motif in Sufism, see for example the diagrams in al-Hallaj’s *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn* (Islamic Book Foundation, Lahore, 1978) and Laleh Bakhtiar’s *Sufi: Expressions of the Mystic Quest* (Thomas & Hudson, London, 1976)

can be drawn, painted, modelled or even danced, as in the Sufi *dhikr*. It expresses ‘completeness and union [and therefore] has the dignity of a “reconciling symbol”... When we now speak of man we mean the indefinable whole of him, an ineffable totality, which can only be formulated symbolically.’¹⁰⁴ In other words, man, the microcosm, like the universe, the macrocosm, is a limitless totality, a whole without borders, and therefore eternally open and unfinished. Significantly, in modern times, man has replaced the deity as the subject of the *mandala*, while the identity of God and man is a definitive element – indeed, the ‘secret’ – of “pre-modern” Sufism. Jung relates the circularity of the deity to the act of circumambulation, which recalls the Islamic ritual of *ṭawāf* around the *Ka‘ba* in Mecca, symbolising the circularity of the psyche. In this light, al-Ḥallāj’s blasphemous suggestion to ‘perform the *ṭawāf* around the *ka‘ba* of your heart’ reveals an attempt to restore meaning to the exoteric action through internalisation. As in the relationship between language and meaning, the *ṭawāf* is an endless walking around the periphery in search of an elusive centre, which is God. Just as the circumference does not exist, neither does the central axis, or *quṭb*, for which the circumambulant searches. The production of the *mandala*, according to Jung, always entails the process of ‘squaring the circle’, that is, translating chaos into order, unconscious into consciousness. This is most likely the psychological motive behind the ritual of circumambulation around a cube-shaped structure.

Furthermore, the *mandala* is a *protective* symbol, a motif of psychological strength, enclosing the subject and preventing disintegration and collapse. It provides order and balance against psychic disruption, and therefore represents both the divine being latent within man and the vessel in which the alchemical transformation from human to divine occurs. The protective circle is ‘the traditional antidote for chaotic states of mind’, such as exile, loss and fragmentation¹⁰⁵:

As a rule a *mandala* occurs in conditions of psychic dissociation or disorientation... [particularly] in adults who, as the result of a neurosis and its treatment, are confronted with the problem of opposites in human nature and are consequently disorientated... In such cases it is easy to see how the severe pattern imposed by a circular image of this kind compensates the disorder and confusion of the psychic state – namely, through the construction of a central point [axis, i.e. “God”] to which everything is related, or by a concentric arrangement of the disordered multiplicity and of contradictory and irreconcilable elements.

¹⁰⁴ Jung, *Psychology*, pp. 95-100

¹⁰⁵ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 10

This is evidently an attempt at self-healing on the part of Nature, which does not spring from conscious reflection but from an instinctive impulse.¹⁰⁶

The *mandala*, then, is the ‘archetype of wholeness’; its purpose is the self, the totality of the psyche, in contradistinction to the ego, which is merely ‘the point of reference for consciousness.’ Enclosure within it represents both psychic unity and protection (i.e. selfhood); exile outside it represents separation from one’s true self (i.e. ego-consciousness). The Sufi journey begins with the seeker’s dissatisfaction with this exilic state. This is the psychological explanation for the myth of Adam’s fall from Paradise: man’s split on entering the symbolic order, as the first lines of Rūmī’s masterpiece the *Mathnawī* attest:

Listen to the story told by the reed,
Of being separated.

“Since I was cut from the reedbed,
I have made this crying sound...”¹⁰⁷

Despair at this existential exile, with its pain and uncertainty, inspires the Sufi’s search for the psychological security of the God within. ‘No one is more conscious of the fall of man than the mystic’¹⁰⁸, says Lings, for whom the essence of Sufism is: divesting the soul of the limitations of fallen man, the habits and prejudices which have become ‘second nature’, and investing it with the characteristics of man’s primordial nature, made in the image of God.¹⁰⁹ Jung, likewise, notes that the myth of man’s fall ‘presents the dawn of consciousness as a curse [removing him from] the paradise of unconscious childhood.’¹¹⁰ The retreat from consciousness means either real death, or symbolic death, *fanā*. Starting from birth, when the child leaves the sanctity of the womb, the horizon of life expands steadily towards a critical point, usually around midlife, ‘when, beset by problems, the individual begins to struggle against it’.¹¹¹ This watershed moment corresponds to the beginning of the Sufi retreat from consciousness towards *fanā*’ or *tawakkul*.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 387-8

¹⁰⁷ al-Rūmī, op.cit., p. 17

¹⁰⁸ Lings, op.cit., p. 58

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 18

¹¹⁰ Jung, *Modern Man*, p. 99

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 104

From the esoteric perspective, the act of creation divided the opposites that are unified in the deity, giving rise to the infinite multiplicity and energy of the world. The Sufi journey effectively returns the seeker to this primordial moment, the birth of existence. Since the Sufi moves forward in time, the circle joining originality and finality is squared: birth and death therefore become synonymous, the same point in space-time.

Perfect union or wholeness, however, would entail a static state, i.e. death, and *mandalas* therefore tend to remain open or occur in series. The return to the world in *baqā'* is but part of an endless existential flux whereby the circle of individuation re-opens the very moment it is closed. The closure of death is thus sublimated into the opening of life.

v) Sufism and Esoteric Chaos: Madness, Creativity and Resistance

We have established that Jung's concept of the unconscious bears similar characteristics to the Sufi conception of the divine. Given that the unconscious, by definition, supersedes rational cognition, it can also be closely identified with the notion of chaos. The Muslim scholar Ziauddin Sardar points out that the term 'chaos' does not imply disorder, but has to do with 'edifices of complexity *without* real randomness'¹¹², i.e. that disguise underlying harmony. This recalls the Sufi principle of *wahdat al-wujūd*, ontological monism. In this context, Jung talks of 'the pre-existent meaning hidden in the chaos of life' and 'the chaotic waters of the beginning', whilst also hypothesizing that the structure of the self can be seen as 'a principle of order against chaos.'¹¹³ All mysticisms are sciences – orderings – of esoteric chaos, as Jung seems aware: 'it is just the most unexpected, the most terrifyingly chaotic things which reveal a deeper meaning... in all chaos there is a cosmos, in all disorder a secret order, in all caprice a fixed law, for everything that works is grounded in its opposite.'¹¹⁴ The unconscious is a problematic and "unscientific" category precisely because it is 'not a second personality with organized and

¹¹² Ziauddin Sardar, *Introducing Chaos*, (Icon, Cambridge, 2002), p.80

¹¹³ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 375. The alchemists, he notes, 'took their prima material to be a part of the original chaos pregnant with the spirit... Their intention was to extract the original divine spirit out of the chaos.' *Psychology*, p.

109
¹¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 31-2

centralized functions but in all probability a decentralized congeries of psychic processes', which he argues, manifests itself in 'fairly chaotic and unsystematic form':

The ground principles... of the unconscious are indescribable because of their wealth of reference, although in themselves recognizable. The discriminating intellect naturally keeps on trying to establish their singleness of meaning [cf. exoteric monotheism] and thus misses the essential point; for what we can above all establish as the one thing consistent with their nature is their manifold meaning [cf esoteric polytheism], their almost limitless wealth of reference, which makes any unilateral formulation impossible.¹¹⁵

In the apparent chaos of psychotic fantasy Jung noted a hidden coherence that provided an insight into the roots of the imbalance. The unpredictable behaviour of the insane signals a disappearance of ego-consciousness in the unconscious. Historically, Sufis have often been aware of the parallel with their relatively controlled and voluntary integration of conscious and unconscious. Like them, Jung advocates allowing the 'chaotic life of the unconscious' its rightful role in life, since no sooner does individuation process stop than the shadow, 'the "chaos" that hides behind the self', gains the ascendancy.

If the *mandala* represents unity, chaos represents infinite multiplicity. Since existence is in permanent flux, the synthesis of elements that constitutes psychic wholeness is forever prone to disintegration. As Yeats puts it, "things fall apart". The human self struggles against this recurring chaos, seeking to return it to the perfect order of the circle, which encompasses multiplicity in its unity. This ordering, this integration of multiplicity and unity, however fleeting, is the goal of the Sufi. Schimmel observes that unity 'can reveal itself only through unfolding in a dialectical process, and its bifurcation and subsequent split into many parts is necessary to keep the current of life going...'¹¹⁶ In this way, Sufi poetry is a means of perceiving 'the Divine Unity behind contradictory manifestations'¹¹⁷: it reveals that the apparent chaotic multiplicity of existence belies a deeper, unified order. This in turn accounts for the heterogeneity and spontaneity of its imagery.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 38

¹¹⁶ Schimmel, op.cit., p. 19

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 19

The fragmentation of Arab life in the 1960s and beyond, when the generation of poets in question reached maturity, would have only increased their awareness that the perfect circle of pre-conscious unity had been shattered. This external reality can be conceived as a chaos for which the subsistence of a unified self might act as a cure. In such a context, the *mandala* is a reassembling of the fragmented whole, bringing unconscious into consciousness, or restoring chaos to order: ‘they serve to produce an inner order – which is why, in a series, they often follow chaotic, disordered states marked by conflict and anxiety. They express the idea of a refuge, of inner reconciliation and wholeness.’¹¹⁸

Since chaos is identified with the unconscious, it is intimately related to creativity. One of the definitive characteristics of great art, according to Jung, is that, like chaos, it forever eludes rational formulation: ‘it can be obscurely sensed, but never wholly grasped.’¹¹⁹ The meaning of a poem is another poem. In discussing *Faust*, Jung touches on the esoteric nature of poetic creativity, which he calls the *visionary* mode of artistic creation:

[It] arises from timeless depths; it is foreign and cold, many-sided, demonic and grotesque. A grimly ridiculous sample of the eternal chaos [...] it bursts asunder our human standards of value and aesthetic form... the primordial experiences rend from top to bottom the curtain upon which is painted the picture of an ordered world, and allow a glimpse into the unfathomed abyss of what has not yet become.¹²⁰

Two ideas are relevant here: the notion of re-ordering the world through chaos; and the parallel between madness and creativity. Art can be seen as the outcome of a pathological or neurotic condition, while the output of psychotics likewise reveals insights usually expected of geniuses: both involve an immediate or numinous experience. Lacanian theory suggests that anyone unable to enter the symbolic order, i.e. to represent their experience linguistically, would become psychotic. In the ill-adapted incoherence of psychosis there are evident parallels with the Sufi experience of esoteric reality. The poetic affinities of ‘psychosis’ are discernible in an effect such as schizophrenia, which

¹¹⁸ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 384

¹¹⁹ Jung, *Modern Man*, p. 157

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 160

involves a detachment from reality and a turning in on the self, with an excessive but loosely systematized production of fantasies: it is as though the... unconscious desire, has surged up and flooded the conscious mind with its illogicality, riddling associations and affective rather than conceptual links between ideas. Schizophrenic language has in this sense an interesting resemblance to poetry.¹²¹

Eagleton's implication is entirely correct: creative inspiration, whether classified as psychotic or mystical, entails a divorce from exoteric reality, the very same subversive 'madness' celebrated by Sufis throughout the ages.¹²² This is the source of poetry's 'illogicality' and disruption of normal conceptual criteria.

Creativity, like chaos, contains something forever unknowable, a mystical secret, and the creative activity will never be fully unpacked: 'the artist does not function in an official capacity [order] – the very opposite is nearer the truth [chaos]... Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument. Whenever the creative force predominates, human life is ruled and moulded by the unconscious as against the active will, and the conscious ego is swept along on a subterranean current...'¹²³ Profound artistic creation functions at a universal level of human experience: the collective unconscious, hence its transcendence of cultural boundaries.

Human existence, on an individual and collective level, can be seen as an endless contest between order and chaos. Collectively, mankind displays a strong inclination for delimiting 'the unruly and arbitrary "supernatural" influence by definite forms and laws', i.e. ordering chaos, or subordinating the individual numinous experience to the institutional one. This rationalising, or *exotericising*, tendency, which accompanied the development of human consciousness, finds 'the God within' a problematic and heretical supposition, since it is hard to reconcile with a fixed political order. (The ideal democracy, in this sense, is a form of organised chaos.) To maintain a socio-political contract, archetypal images become 'embedded in a comprehensive system of thought that ascribes an order to the world, and are at the same time represented by a mighty, far-spread, and venerable institution...'¹²⁴ It is when this institution has become so entrenched as to be almost entirely static and out of step with reality that the voice of esoteric chaos reasserts

¹²¹ Eagleton, *op.cit.*, p.138

¹²² Sufism and psychosis differ, however, in to what extent the ego is deliberately submerged by unconscious forces.

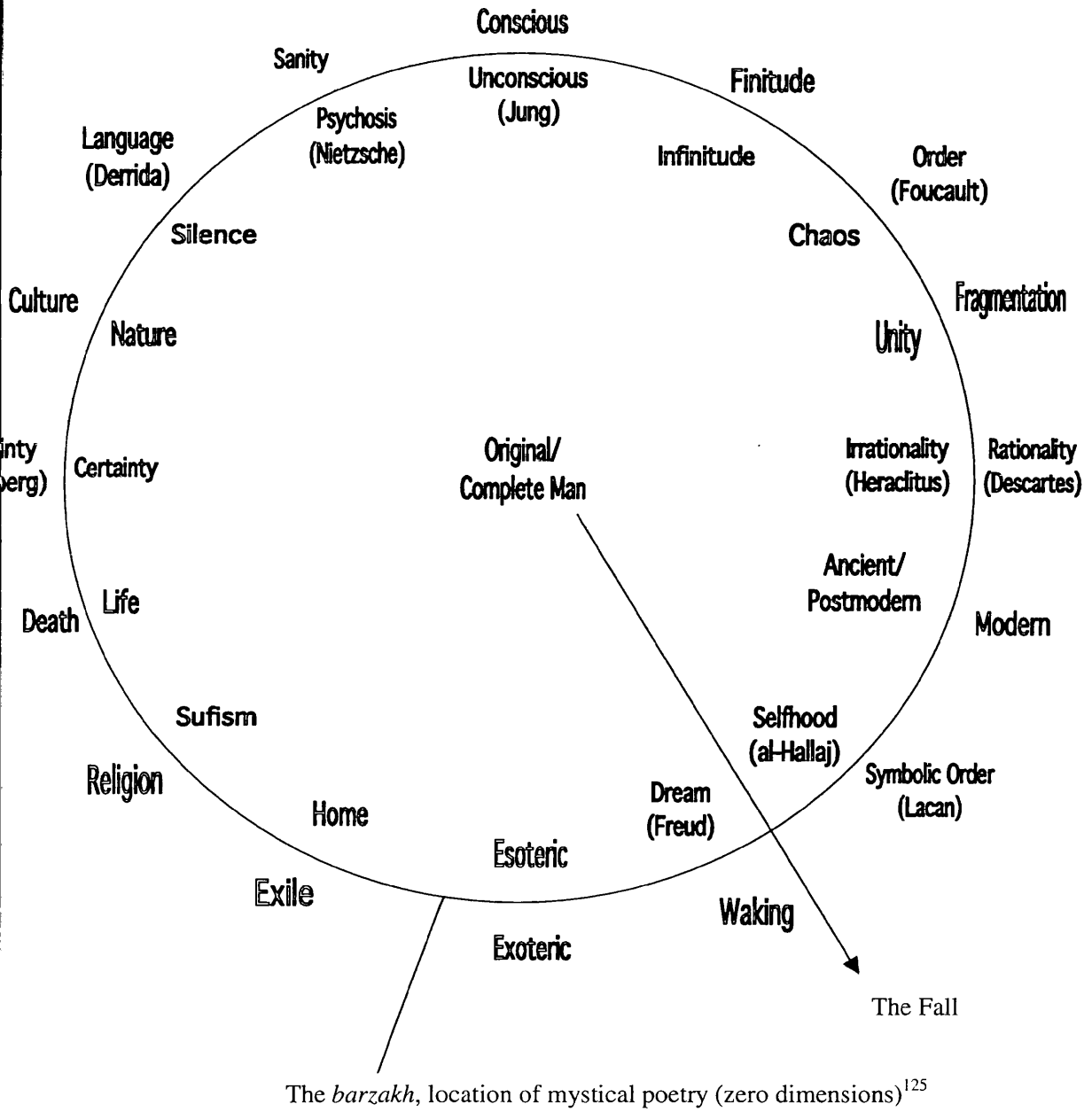
¹²³ Jung, *Modern Man*, p. 172-3

¹²⁴ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 8

itself, exposing and deconstructing the arbitrary order. In light of the extreme anathematisation of the esoteric function, which is seen as a subversive threat, chaos becomes a motif of political resistance.

From the exoteric, institutional perspective, God is synonymous with the collective Order: the maintenance of a 'divine' socio-political structure to which all individuals are nominally subordinated. This exoteric order, whether through theologians or ideologues, seeks to perpetuate itself by enforcing its self-legitimizing values and warning gravely of the dangers of non-conformism. In the esoteric perspective, the integrity of the individual self takes precedence. Against an arbitrarily imposed order, therefore, the Sufi effectively posits the divine chaos of the super-rational unconscious, rejecting the need for oppressive social control within a static, conservative edifice and opening the way for a political philosophy of freedom and mobility. Using Sufi ideas may therefore be a way of undermining the inherited order and attempting to remake the world. This tension between individual integrity and collective distortion is encapsulated in al-Ḥallāj's challenge to the edifice of theocratic control. By rejecting the dominant political order, al-Ḥallāj undermined its totalitarian claims to divine reality and opened a path to the restoration of individual truth.

The theoretical background discussed thus far – particularly the parallels between Sufism, post-structuralist thought and Jungian psychology – can be represented diagrammatically in a modern *mandala* showing man's departure from the divine womb of unconsciousness into the exile of the symbolic order, i.e. the fall from Paradise. The aim of the classical Sufi was to restore himself to this circle, i.e. to become original and complete man simultaneously, joining beginning and end. This will help to conceptualise and contextualise the psychological journey of neo-Sufism.



¹²⁵ "Uncertainty" refers to the physicist Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, while "certainty" refers both to the pre-modern certainty of religion and the postmodern certainty of uncertainty.

The Crisis of Modernity

i) Split Consciousness

The neo-Sufi poets, while specifically Arab, were heirs to both the European Enlightenment and Arab/Islamic thought. As discussed above, the catastrophe of World War 1 manifested a profound mental disturbance in the European mind, undermining the rational perspective and paving the way for existentialist philosophy, and the events of 1948 had a similar impact in the Arab world. For the present purposes, the mainstream traditions of European Christianity and Arab Islam, which are already highly problematic concepts in themselves, can be viewed as alternative but neighbouring strands of Abrahamic monotheism. Viewed from beyond this context – for example, from the perspective of Buddhism or Taoism, both of which exhibit philosophical parallels with Sufism¹²⁶ – these traditions reveal more similarities than differences: both were essentially exoteric, institutional religions that posited an absolute opposition between good and evil and demanded total allegiance from their adherents.¹²⁷ Levi-Strauss' encounter with Islam, which he described as 'the West of the East', is instructive here. The psychological crisis of modernity, being a human phenomenon, has therefore applied to both cases, albeit in different ways.

Man's descent into consciousness – the fall from nature to culture – is the definitive characteristic of the modern era. From time immemorial, Nature held sway over the world and the gods performed their roles. In modern times, however, the world of instincts was swallowed up and the gods were no more. Science became the watchword and universal standard of the age. This shift produced an inner tension in the psyche, which became at variance with itself, a battleground between conscious and unconscious. In Europe, the dominance of reason from the 16th century opened up a profound schism within the collective psyche: man became progressively uprooted from his instinctual foundation, identifying with ego-consciousness at the expense of integrated selfhood. Indeed, Jung argued that Western man is in danger of losing sight of his shadow altogether in favour of the abstract world of scientific rationalism, a relatively narrow

¹²⁶ See for example Toshihiko Izutsu, *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism: Ibn 'Arabī and Lao-Tzu, Chuang-Tzu* (Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, Tokyo, 1966-7)

¹²⁷ Similarly, Jung noted that from the Eastern or archaic perspectives, our exoteric consciousness appeared mad or psychotic.

consciousness through which he has actually placed himself in severe danger of possession. The underestimation of the unconscious factors in life, or the anathematisation of the esoteric, is pursued at the cost of psychic imbalance: intellectual gain entails a spiritual loss. Progress and development, for all their benefits, remain false so long as man is a mere fragment of himself. The danger here is that the conscious mind, being split off from its origins, relapses into the primitive condition of an identity, or “participation mystique”, with the mass, which only accentuates the problem. The anathematisation of the esoteric traps man in an aimless, meaningless experience for which the intellect has no answer. Such a predicament may lead towards annihilation or voluntary death – *fanā’* – of the conscious ego in the face of a resurgent archetype:

Human interpretation fails, for a turbulent life-situation has arisen that refuses to fit any of the traditional meanings assigned to it. It is a moment of collapse. We sink into a final depth – Apuleius calls it “a kind of voluntary death”. It is a surrender of our own powers, not artificially willed but forced upon us by nature...¹²⁸

The split consciousness of Enlightenment rationalism led directly to both the dominance of ideology and a condition of spiritual orphaning, with the consequent re-activation of unconscious drives. The great achievements of science brought a simultaneous lack of introspection and self-knowledge, based on the assumption of mutual exclusivity between scientific and religious truths. Without the metaphysical framework of religion, morality became unstuck. As the religious worldview lost authority, however, long submerged archetypal forces could reassert themselves once more. The end of religion did not signal the death of absolutism, since ‘a natural function which has existed from the beginning, like the religious function, cannot be disposed of with rationalistic and so-called enlightened criticism.’¹²⁹ For Jung, man is always, overtly or covertly, possessed by a supraordinate idea, which remains his motivating force:

The modern mind has forgotten those old truths that speak of the death of the old man and of the making of a new one, of spiritual rebirth and similar old-fashioned “mystical absurdities.”¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 32

¹²⁹ C.G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, (Routledge, London, 1957), p. 19

¹³⁰ Jung, *Psychology*, p. 41

It is worth noting that such a view of the modern predicament corresponds to a large degree to the Sufi view of 'normal' man as fatally blinded to the source of reality and in need of replenishing his immediate spiritual experiences.

One salient aspect of the modern era, particularly in the Arab context, is the accumulation of urban, industrialized masses, who have often been torn from the soil of their youth or ancestry for economic or political reasons. Once cut off from 'the nourishing roots of instinct', man may fall prey to extreme alienation, and his dependency on others increases. Dissociation between the childhood state and the present predicament, which may result from the pursuit of an external goal, produces a sense of falsehood and rootlessness, which is precisely the condition for a 'vehement confrontation with the primary truth.'¹³¹ The more the urban man's differentiated consciousness pushes him towards a one-sided viewpoint, the further he deviates from the roots of his being. However, the split-off part of the psyche is 'only *apparently* inactivated; in actual fact it brings about a possession of the personality, with the result that the individual's aims are falsified in the interests of the split-off part.'¹³² In other words, the unconscious psyche continues to manifest itself, and it is merely a question of the preparedness and attitude of the individual in question whether this turns out beneficially or otherwise. In this context, the power of the archetype to unite opposites makes it a medium between unconscious and conscious: 'it throws a bridge between present-day consciousness, always in danger of losing its roots, and the natural, unconscious instinctive wholeness of primeval times.'¹³³ No sooner has a pathological state been reached than the archetypes irrupt autonomously into consciousness. By repressing the transcendent function of the archetypes, rather than allowing them expression, the modern era is prone to collective neuroses. At such times, not only individuals but whole civilizations are charged with rediscovering their unconscious backgrounds. In both cases, the task is to reintegrate and reconcile the more recently acquired consciousness with its older counterpart.

The Islamic worldview, with its appeal to one transcendent God, was not immune to the threat posed by reason. Its disintegration can be interpreted as a combination of external and internal factors: the challenge of Western modernity, with its technology and power, and the

¹³¹ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 162

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 163-4

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 174

institutionalization and ossification of the original revealed knowledge of the Prophet into a divinely sanctioned Order, which increasingly removed it from individual experience. The dissolution of the age-old *Weltanschauung* and weakening of its institutions gave rise to relative intellectual pluralism. But just as this religious worldview disappeared, another rose in its place: the modern state. Both are external institutions that base their authority on rational principles, or *‘ilm*. If the religious state entailed absolutist theocracy, the state inclined towards totalitarianism, a secular absolutism:

The old religions with their sublime and ridiculous, their friendly and fiendish symbols, did not drop from the blue, but were born of this human soul that dwells within us... Our fearsome gods have only changed their names: they now rhyme with -ism.¹³⁴

Just as the worldly institution of a religion attempts to maintain a monopoly on spiritual wellbeing, so the state tended to become the *sine qua non* of the individual's right to existence. The allegiance of the masses was converted 'from an extramundane goal to a purely worldly belief', whilst maintaining a similar level of dedication. The god-like status of Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir is a case in point. By the 1960s, radical Arab intellectuals had begun to realise that the face of political order had changed, but not its structure. However, the religious institution does at least offer some possibility of a metaphysical experience, in contrast to the rank materialism of the state. Furthermore, its original undermining had provided a new freedom from external control, whereby man had the chance of unique spiritual experience, but it also meant the loss of the protective ecclesiastical walls within which existential meaning could be conceived. The Kierkegaardian belief in a commitment to the irrational is one reaction to this loss; for him, modern society had 'forgotten why man's life should be sacrificial, that is, offered up to an idea greater than man.'¹³⁵

The age of Enlightenment and the disintegration of transcendent religion was, therefore, a double-edged sword: it left man exposed, imbalanced and alienated – 'battered by the elemental forces of his own psyche' – but it also offered him a new opportunity for self-knowledge. Without the familiar historical symbols to provide psychic security, the great, dark abyss of

¹³⁴ C.G. Jung, *Essays on Contemporary Events*, (Routledge, London, 2002), p. 95

¹³⁵ Jung, *Psychology*, p. 94

nihilism yawned before him. Attempts to elevate secular dogma to absolute status, effectively in place of God, only compounded the predicament. Mankind's very progress was at the heart of the problem:

When any natural human function gets lost, i.e. is denied conscious and intentional expression, a general disturbance results. Hence, it is quite natural that with the triumph of the Goddess of Reason a general neuroticizing of modern man should set in...¹³⁶

Furthermore, Jung argues, it is precisely when consciousness enters a critical situation that unconscious fantasies are activated as a means of compensation. Failure to integrate this compensatory unconscious into consciousness only leads to neurosis or psychosis, both individually and collectively. The removal of the highest symbol allows secret unconscious forces to be reborn and hold sway. This unconscious *Zeitgeist* both offsets the conscious attitude and anticipates imminent changes. Modern art itself is an example of this: its above-noted nihilistic tendency towards disintegration, with its breakdown of aesthetic values, is 'an act of psychological education' and 'a symptom and symbol of a mood of world destruction and world renewal that has set its mark on our age.'¹³⁷ Against this state of spiritual emptiness the dark art of poetry provides a balance:

It is only we who have repudiated [the esoteric] because of our fear of superstition and metaphysics, and because we strive to construct a conscious world that is safe and manageable... Yet, even in our midst, the poet now and then catches sight of the figures that people the night-world – the spirits, demons and gods. He knows that a purposiveness out-reaching human ends is the life-giving secret for man; he has a presentiment of incomprehensible happenings in the pleroma.¹³⁸

The poet instinctively embodies the archetypal images that are activated to counterbalance a false, one-sided reality, archetypes such as the perfect man, the redeemer, and the wise man, who comes to restore the psychic equilibrium of the epoch and meet the spiritual needs of his society.

¹³⁶ Jung, *Undiscovered Self*, p. 46

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 77

¹³⁸ Jung, *Modern Man*, p. 167

The dangers of the archetypal resurgence are clear. According to Jung, Nazism revolved around the revival of an ancient Germanic symbol, Wotan, producing a mass emotion which utterly overpowered individual will. This was, however, a direct symptom of the collective neurosis of modern man: the psychic imbalance that was so conspicuous in Germany, where national isolation combined with centralization and mass psychology to such devastating effect, was in fact a universal condition. In the Arab world, the revival of ancient myths by the Ba'ath and the SSNP was also response to the defeat, social disruptions, and disintegration of transcendent authority. Industrialization and urbanization herded large sections of the population into cities and estranged them from the natural laws of human existence, producing 'unstable, insecure and suggestible' individuals. In both the European and Arab cases, the powerful resurgence of archaic "*representations collectives*", the compensatory move of the unconscious, produced catastrophic results. In both, the dire circumstances and loss of religious worldview increased the need for a heroic bringer of collective salvation, who would be the exponent of a "new order". Furthermore, the prevailing belief that truth came from above and the subordination of individual responsibility to a rigid sense of duty only exacerbated the proclivity towards mass psychology.

ii) Individual and Mass in Modern Society

For Jung, modern consciousness has dramatically decreased the value and importance of the individual, the carrier of the human psyche, in relation to mass movements, which carry only a false psychic reality. He considered the political mass movements of his time as psychic epidemics, i.e. *mass psychoses*, in which the individual became weak and virtually non-existent. Both religious theocracy and secular totalitarianism prioritized the notion of the collectivized mass and their rulers over the individual, reducing him to 'a helpless particle.'¹³⁹ A state run on this basis entailed the destruction and atomization of the fragile individual for the sake of a fictive entity that was itself no more than a group of exploitative individuals claiming to represent the whole nation. Such mass movements subordinate the very individuals for whom they purportedly function to a purely theoretical objective: maintenance of the state became a goal in itself, imprisoning its subjects in the process. They were 'the greatest temptation to unconsciousness':

¹³⁹ Jung, *Contemporary Events*, p. 44. He quotes from Pestalozzi: "...All the means requisite for the education of man, which serve to make him truly humane and to bring him to mankindliness, are in their origin and essence the concern of the individual and of such institutions as are closely and intimately attached to his heart and mind. They never were nor will be the concern of the masses. They never were or will be the concern of civilization."

by activating unconscious archetypes, they subordinated the responsible human being to a hypostatized super-organism and thus relegated him/her to an intellectually and ethically inferior level:

The collective man threatens to stifle the individual man, on whose sense of responsibility everything valuable in mankind ultimately depends.¹⁴⁰

The artist is the individual *par excellence*; his higher consciousness by definition sets him apart from the mass. It is his process of individuation – fulfilling his *individual* potential – that balances out the collectivized self. For mystic and psychologist alike, individual integrity is paramount:

... the individual experience, with its very poverty, is immediate life, it is the warm red blood pulsating today. It is more convincing to a seeker after truth than the best tradition.¹⁴¹

Further, ‘absolute reality has the character of irregularity’¹⁴²: the more any theory or idea claims exclusive universal validity, the less it can do justice to each individual, who is by definition unique and exceptional, an irrational datum. Self-knowledge, the ultimate objective of the individual, cannot be approached through theoretical assumptions. Prioritising uniqueness over uniformity substantiates the mystical view of identity as internally rooted. Scientific or statistical methodology, based on abstract knowledge, imparts a one-sided perspective: ‘one of the chief factors responsible for psychological mass-mindedness is scientific rationalism, which robs the individual of his foundations and his dignity [whereby] he can only play the role of an interchangeable unit of infinitesimal importance.’¹⁴³ A specifically collective human goal that is externally enforced on the individual is a contradiction in terms. In succumbing to a collective identity, man is thereby estranged from himself, or exiled from real existence: he exists only as a function of an abstract, external idea. Furthermore, the dictator state not only denies the individual his rights, but also deprives him of the metaphysical foundations of his existence.

¹⁴⁰ Jung, from a lecture given in 1933, quoted in *ibid*, p. 89

¹⁴¹ Jung, *Psychology*, p. 63

¹⁴² Jung, *Undiscovered Self*, p. 5

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 9-10

Ideology betrays human dignity whether it is “left” or “right”, while the mystical path functions esoterically, i.e. beyond this political spectrum altogether.

By inhibiting the possibility of individual development, collective ideas arouse a yearning for spiritual freedom among more perceptive individuals, not least artists, who seek to restore a balance. In this context, both religious and secular institutions may be equally fallible and prone to absolutism. The individual is threatened on both sides: he may overcome the religious institution only to fall into its secular equivalent. Indeed, Jung perceived ‘a fatal parallelism between the State religion of the Marxists and the State religion of the Church...’¹⁴⁴ While one institution promised perfection in the next world and one in this, both relied on the same epistemological foundations, namely rational, exoteric knowledge, or *‘ilm*,¹⁴⁵ which denies that a thing can be simultaneously itself and its other.

If the individual comes before the collective, then all social and political transformations originate in him, and he must make himself responsible. The mass movement cannot, by definition, provide the deep-seated transformation for which man yearns: hence the naivety of expecting everything from the state. Resistance to this organized mass, Jung asserts, can only be achieved by the man who is as organized as the mass himself, i.e. who views himself as an existential microcosm, but such a self-conception has mostly disappeared with the advance of modernity. This existential microcosm is none other than the Anthropos, *al-insān al-kāmil*, who redefines the parameters of truth and morality.

In the modern collective context, then, man is atomized, fragmented, frustrated and fundamentally exiled from himself. His unique individuality, wherein he may experience fulfilment and meaning, is constantly threatened with annihilation into an abstract idea, lured by the temptation of a *participation mystique*. Man’s modern immersion in exoteric consciousness blinds him to the inexorable activity of his unconscious drives, which may ultimately control him. It is precisely this exoteric state that the Sufī rejects in order to reassert the immaculate truth of the individual self through appropriation of the God within, i.e. by neutralising these same

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 27-8

¹⁴⁵ It seems highly significant here that the Arabic word *‘ilm* can refer to both theology and science, thus putting them on an equivalent epistemological level.

unconscious drives. In the radically exoteric modern era, then, the unconscious will inevitably compensate its undervaluation, whether collectively through the activation of dangerous and distorting archetypes, or individually through active engagement by those wishing to restore existential meaning and human integrity.

iii) Nietzsche's Zarathustrian Experience

'Why', asks Jung, 'have the antique gods lost their prestige and their effect upon human souls? It was because the Olympic gods had served their time and a new mystery began: God became man.'¹⁴⁶ It is no coincidence that someone who engaged so openly with Eastern religion was so influenced by Nietzsche and so fascinated by his psychological condition.¹⁴⁷ This tortured soul, who took it upon himself to kill off the transcendent, exoteric God and in doing so portended the reassertion of his esoteric counterpart, is a pivotal figure in the historical and theoretical background to neo-Sufism. It is not illogical for a previously suppressed psychological condition to reassert itself when the factors suppressing it – God projected as an autonomous entity – begin to subside. Jung draws our attention to 'the disintegrating and schismatic effect of individual revelation.' With the breakdown of the dogmatic fence and the loss of ritual authority and its protective power, man is confronted with the inner experience. Paradoxically, the despiritualization of the world, or the withdrawal of projections, encouraged an esoteric resurgence: 'the way of the soul in search of its lost father... leads to the water, to the dark mirror of that reposes at its bottom... This water is no figure of speech, but a living symbol of the dark psyche.'¹⁴⁸ For Jung, Nietzsche was the latest symptom of Europe's conspicuous mental change:

Did not Nietzsche announce that God was dead and that his heir was the Superman, that doomed rope-dancer and fool? It is an immutable psychological law that when a projection has come to an end it always

¹⁴⁶ Jung, *Psychology*, p. 98

¹⁴⁷ Like Jung, Nietzsche was profoundly aware that ego-consciousness is merely superficial and that primary reality belonged to the subliminal world of dreams. He even appeared to be conscious of the existence in dreams of what Jung would later call archetypes: "In our sleep and in our dreams we pass through the whole thought of earlier humanity. I mean, in the same way that man reasons in his dreams, he reasoned when in the waking state many thousands of years. The first *causa* which occurred to his mind in reference to anything that needed explanation, satisfied him and passed for truth. In the dream this atavistic relic of humanity manifests its existence within us, for it is the foundation upon which the higher rational faculty developed, and which is still developing in every individual. The dream carries us back into earlier states of human culture, and affords us a means of understanding it better." Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human, II*, p. 27, quoted in *ibid*, p. 65

¹⁴⁸ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 17

returns to its origin. So when somebody hits on the singular idea that God is dead, or does not exist at all, the psychic God-image... finds its way back into the subject and produces a condition of "God-Almightiness"...¹⁴⁹

Such a condition is potentially disastrous, since the unconscious is an ethically ambiguous domain, in which 'good' and 'evil' are as yet undifferentiated. It contains both genius and madness, both enlightenment and the 'shadow' that lurks behind the façade of contemporary man. Nietzsche's terrifying proclamation of God's death in 1882 tellingly reveals his own realisation that alternative conceptions, such as that of man unified and divine, must fill the psychological vacuum:

We have killed him... How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from the sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? ... Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? ... Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker? ... What lustrums, what sacred games shall we have to devise? Is not the magnitude of this deed too great for us? *Shall we not ourselves have to become Gods*, merely to seem worthy of it?¹⁵⁰

Something was needed to restore meaning to existence in place of the bankrupt orthodoxy. No sooner had Nietzsche debunked the Christian god than he re-introduced another, more ancient one, Dionysus, an archetypal rebirth god. With the fragmentation of the monotheistic Christian god came both the rise of atheism and the resurgence of polytheism, the ancient gods. It was a time of no god and many gods simultaneously, and the psychic God-image remained potent. In the German case, this archetype became Wotan, the 'ancient god of storm and frenzy... a restless wanderer who creates unrest and stirs up strife, now here, now there, and works magic... the master of secret knowledge, the magician, and the god of the poets [who has a] mythological background and a fateful significance.'¹⁵¹ Wotan had been asleep in the primeval pagan German soil. For Nietzsche, the classical scholar, he became manifested in the form of Dionysus-Zagreus, and later Zarathustra, also 'a soothsayer, a magician, and the storm-wind...' Jung's interpretation

¹⁴⁹ Jung, *Contemporary Events*, p. 82

¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, quoted in K.J. Phillips, *Dying Gods in Twentieth Century Fiction*, (London and Toronto, Associated University Presses, 1990), pp. 18-9. Emphasis added.

¹⁵¹ Jung, *Contemporary Events*, pp. 12-22

of Nietzsche's seminal distinction between the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of life reveals a strong Sufi resonance:

...the dark, earthly, feminine side, with its mantic and orgiastic characteristics, has possessed the imagination of philosophers and poets [for whom] logos and consciousness are the destroyers of creative preconscious life. [Here] we witness the gradual rejection of reality and a negation of life as it is. This leads in the end to a cult of ecstasy, culminating in the self-dissolution of consciousness in death, which meant, to them, the conquest of material limitations.¹⁵²

Thus the archetypal Wotan was reborn as a chaotic, elemental Dionysus 'breaking into the Apollonian order'¹⁵³, embodying the instinctual aspect of the unconscious and later sweeping a defeated, alienated nation from its insecure roots, something Nietzsche himself prophetically foresaw. This god represents a primitive totality, recalling a time when the human had not yet been differentiated from the divine, and simultaneously presaging to a time when this split might be reintegrated, as in the Anthropos archetype.

Nietzsche himself was a sickly, emotionally starved, spiritually exiled wanderer. He came from a line of Protestant pastors and was deeply religious in his youth. It is axiomatic that 'the religious influences of childhood are the hardest things to extirpate.'¹⁵⁴ His poem "To the Unknown God", written at the age of twenty, reveals a more god-possessed man than he dared later admit:

I shall and will know thee, Unknown One,
 Who searchest out the depths of my soul,
 And blowest through my life like a storm,
 Ungraspable, and yet my kinsman!
 I shall and will know thee, and serve thee.¹⁵⁵

Nietzsche remained possessed by this Unknown God, who reappears in the words of the sorcerer in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 14

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 21

¹⁵⁴ Barrett, op.cit., p. 183

¹⁵⁵ Nietzsche, quoted in ibid, p. 186

Thus I lie
 Bend myself, twist myself, tortured
 By every eternal torment
 Smitten
 By you, cruel huntsman,
 You unknown – God!¹⁵⁶

So overwhelming was the task of ‘breaking the old tablets’ that Nietzsche clearly needed to support himself through a revived Zarathustra: an alter-ego, a secondary personality with whom he became fully identified, thus falling into psychosis: ‘the tragedy of Zarathustra is that, because his god died, Nietzsche himself became a god... and this happened because he was no atheist [for] there are not many individuals as sensitive and as religious as Nietzsche...’¹⁵⁷ The death of God exposes the religiously inclined directly to the perils of “inflation”: identification with the infinite realm of the unconscious. The considerable energy of the “tremendum” will always reappear under another name, often an –ism, a *representation collective*. The transcendent function cannot be rationalised out of existence: man cannot escape this condition.

Like the Sufis, Nietzsche effectively sought to eradicate the human and replace it with the divine, recreating ‘the legendary seer of prehistoric times.’¹⁵⁸ For Heidegger, he at once embodied the culmination and destruction of the entire edifice of Western exoteric thought that had been founded when Descartes set up a fatal antagonism between the ego and the external world of nature, reducing it to a theatre of human exploitation. By completing the circle, Nietzsche ended this metaphysical tradition, exposing both the fundamental error at its origin and the terrifying contingency of its morality. He was a destroyer, madman and prophet, ruthlessly exposing the blindspot that pervaded Western thought. All that remained was the organic unity of the human psyche, out of which the esoteric gods of postmodernity would emerge.

Nietzsche’s instinctive, super-moral Superman, or god-man, combines unconscious with consciousness, and thus connects the primordial past to an as-yet unrealised future in a putative *mandala*, like a snake with its tail in its mouth. These two temporal aspects share the primacy of

¹⁵⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, (Penguin, London, 1961), p. 265

¹⁵⁷ Jung, *Psychology*, pp. 103-5

¹⁵⁸ Jung, *Modern Man*, p. 168

the unconscious, in contrast to ego-consciousness: the long-forgotten past of drunken ecstasy represents a time prior to the split in human consciousness, which is restored in an idealised future, as in Sufi *baqā'* or Buddhist *nirvana*.¹⁵⁹ The Superman is an expression of the Anthropos, whose prominence in the Sufi tradition is rooted in the concept the Muḥammadan reality (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*). The Anthropos archeptye, or *al-insān al-kāmil*, which was developed by ibn al-ʿArabī and culminated in the systematization of ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jilī (c.1365-1428), reaches a prophetic level of consciousness. Nietzsche's Superman, likewise, was the prophet of a new epoch, albeit one who claimed to disdain followers: 'and only when you have all denied me will I return to you.'¹⁶⁰

Nietzsche's project was explicitly the 'revaluation of all values', i.e. a re-ordering of things, which required immersion into the esoteric chaos. His destructive frenzy – his 'overthrowing of idols' – is a symptom of his headlong plunge into the dark and dangerous world of the unconscious. Only there, wherein lies the unity of opposites, could the world be remade:

- and he who wants to be a creator in good and evil has first to be a destroyer and break values.

*Thus the greatest evil belongs with the greatest good: this, however, is the creative good.*¹⁶¹

His is an extreme esoterism: his works, particularly *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, testify to a painful journey of self-knowledge and the sublime chaos of the unitive experience. His fate was 'one of the great episodes in man's historic effort to know himself.'¹⁶² As in Sufism, the emphasis was on the actual *experience* of higher consciousness, rather than theoretical understanding thereof: he even claimed that reading this book 'would raise one to a higher level of mortals than 'modern' man could attain to.'¹⁶³ His descent into the unconscious was a dangerous – he who dives down must first ensure his contact with the surface – but necessary mission to restore something that seemed irrevocably lost: the primary reality of the psyche.

¹⁵⁹ Nietzsche himself spoke approvingly of Buddhism, which is philosophically close to Sufism, in contrast to 'such pitiable things as Christianity.'

¹⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, p. 105

¹⁶¹ Nietzsche, *Why I Am So Wise*, (Penguin, London, 2004), p. 60

¹⁶² Barrett, op.cit., p. 179

¹⁶³ Nietzsche, *Why I Am...* p. 48

Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, which he describes as 'born out of the innermost abundance of truth',¹⁶⁴ can be read as a passionate argument for the integrity of the individual against an arbitrary moral orthodoxy and ideological institution. At every turn, Nietzsche endorsed individual specificity against mass orthodoxy. He himself *embodied* in its most acute form the struggle between nature and culture that defined the age, the pagan Dionysus versus Christ. Man, a complex and inherently contradictory being, had become an enigma to himself and his prophetic mission was to rediscover his identity. The most civilized of men had cut themselves off from their roots and were in serious danger of losing their connection with the earth. Modern life had departmentalized and fragmented man's being; Dionysus, the god of intoxication and instinct, might restore these psychic fragments into a whole. As such, Nietzsche's ecstatic extremism was a dramatic response to the modern predicament: he was the definitive symbol of the attempt to restore inner meaning. His philosophy was a personal and self-contradictory confession, in keeping with the characteristics of the unconscious.

Nietzsche's voice 'is unorthodox, it is even unconventional to a shocking degree: it takes religion seriously, puts it upon the very apex of life, of a life containing "either side", and thus upsets the most cherished intellectual and rational prejudices.'¹⁶⁵ 'Religion' plays a largely social function, substituting the genuine spiritual encounter for a set of mediating symbols and rituals organized around a central dogma. Orthodoxy thereby shields the majority from the powerful and subversive nature of the immediate religious experience, extinguishing individuality in the super-organism. If Zarathustra was 'godless', his creator most certainly was not. Nietzsche's atheism revealed the meaning of the religious experience far more effectively than most forms of theism. Zarathustra was, in fact, far more religious than the institution he deigned to replace. He was Nietzsche's autobiographical, poetic work, created not by the intellect but by the gushing torrent of the unconscious. But for all his esoteric chaos, Zarathustra reveals an inner coherence, despite his author's professed distrust of all systems. His mountain existence symbolized the solitude of the spirit, reflecting Nietzsche's isolation. Like the primordial figure of the wise magician or the medicine man, Zarathustra is:

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 5

¹⁶⁵ Jung, *Psychology*, p. 51

the lofty spirit of an almost Homeric age... the carrier and mouthpiece of [Nietzsche's] own "Dionysian" enlightenment and ecstasy... [He] is more for Nietzsche than a poetic figure, he is an involuntary confession, a testament. Nietzsche too had lost his way in the darkneses of a life that turned its back upon God and Christianity, and that is why there came to him the revealer and enlightener, the speaking fountainhead of his soul.¹⁶⁶

Writing Zarathustra was a shattering experience: out of a critic and aphorist it conjured a poet and a prophet, sent to restore balance to the age. In Nietzsche's hands, poetry was once more a dark, subversive art. For better or worse, the poet / prophet is guided by the collective unconscious to the attainment of that to which people unconsciously aspire. As such, Zarathustra was a compensatory reaction to the *Zeitgeist* from the artist *par excellence*, who embodies an overweight of collective psychic life. Nietzsche was well aware of the enormity of this task:

The unmasking of Christian values is an event without equal, a real catastrophe. He who exposes it is a *force majeure*, a destiny – he breaks the history of mankind into two parts. One lives *before* him, one lives *after* him...¹⁶⁷

This higher man is overtaken by an innate drive that sculpts the psychic life of mankind and sacrifices his individual interests for the sake of his mission:

Great poetry draws its strength from the life of mankind... Whenever the collective unconscious becomes a living experience and is brought to bear on the conscious outlook of an age, this event is a creative act which is of importance to everyone living in that age. A work of art is produced that contains what may truthfully be called a message to generations of men.¹⁶⁸

The Zarathustrian symbol had already been seen in Goethe's *Faust*, which expressed 'the same "hungering for the infinite" born of inner contradiction and dichotomy, the same eschatological expectation of the Great Fulfilment.'¹⁶⁹ Spengler used the term "Faustian culture" to refer to the entire modern epoch in which man challenged the ascendancy of nature. Nietzsche's self-conception as the anti-Christ and rejection of morality recalled Faust's pact with the devil. Each

¹⁶⁶ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 37

¹⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Why I Am...* p. 68

¹⁶⁸ Jung, *Modern Man*, p. 169

¹⁶⁹ Jung, *Contemporary Events*, p. 73

symbolised their author's individuation, their quest to find the superior, complete individual. If traditional morality was falsely premised and blind to its own psychological motives, man must incorporate his devil, as in certain Eastern religions, since 'the tree that would grow taller must send its roots down deeper' into the earth.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, this left the not inconsiderable problem of the ethical ambiguity of the unconscious.

In the Arab milieu, the crisis of modernity that culminated in Nietzsche's Zarathustrian experience was accentuated by two significant factors, rendering Jung's critique of rationalism all the more relevant. Firstly, due to the presence of the imperialist other whose identity was firmly bound up in rational principles, the experience of modernity could not occur as a natural or organic process. Secondly, this process was concertinaed into a far shorter period than in the European case, where it had matured over several centuries. Thus, the Arab intellectual found himself confronted with a predicament equivalent to, yet even more precarious and traumatic, than that which Nietzsche had suffered. The Islamic God had not been killed by an organic development from within the same culture, but by implication of the presence of an aggressive and exploitative other. It will come as no surprise, therefore, to find that Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who was explicitly linked to the long esoteric tradition of Persia of which Sufism is part, would become a seminal symbol among Arab poets who struggled to restore meaning to a wounded age. Jung's insights into modern man's spiritual malaise and his searching appraisal of Nietzsche's condition, thus provides a significant foundation for the examination of neo-Sufism.

¹⁷⁰ Barrett, *op.cit.*, p. 190

Specific Objectives

This introductory chapter has examined the historical and theoretical background against which to examine neo-Sufism. This has included biographical information on the poets in question and a summary of the cultural and political milieu in which they wrote, followed by investigation of the nature of Sufism and its relation to poetry and existence, including reference to certain key Sufi concepts such as *wahdat al-wujūd*, *fanā'* and *baqā'*, *al-insān al-kāmil*, *al-barzakh* and *tawakkul*. This has necessitated a comparative analysis between Sufism and modern European thought, particularly vis-à-vis Nietzsche, post-structuralism and Jungian psychology. We have seen that post-structuralist theory reveals exoteric reality to be no more than a symbolic order – a system of signs – founded on an existential absence. It is this absence, this hypostatic dimension, that the Sufi conceives of as the divine Presence. For him, this is the true Reality: a surreal, interexistent, and infinite domain where intuition and imagination hold sway over logic and reason. As Jung observed, such a contention cannot be objectively proved or disproved – the only consideration is that it is *his* truth. The foundations have thereby been laid for examination of each poet's use of Sufism, which will form the main body of the thesis (chapters 1,2 and 3).

As noted above, the choice of these three poets was based on the prominence of Sufi ideas in their work, their various national and ideological backgrounds and experiences, and their diverse literary inclinations. As such it is hoped that, considered both as separate case studies and collectively, they will provide a reasonably accurate cross-section of the radical Arab intellectual and writer in the mid-late 20th century. However, we will also need to consider two hypotheses in particular: (1) that Sufism was used as a statement of individuality in the face of mass ideas; and (2) that Sufism gained a greater prominence as a theme in Arabic literature as merely part of a broader shift towards more indigenous cultural thought systems and spiritual or religious phenomena. If either hypothesis proves valid, what conclusions can be drawn? In sum, we must investigate the accuracy and effectiveness of classifying this Sufi inclination as a specifically “neo-Sufi” movement, and as well as the possibilities of defining it temporally, geographically, philosophically, and in terms of scope and influence. If the three poets began to use Sufism at a particular historical moment, to what extent should this be attributed to psychological and/or sociological factors?

Moreover, whilst acknowledging the importance of Sufism in this context, the potential pitfall of overstatement must be avoided. Sufi ideas cannot be examined in isolation from the other theoretical influences on these poets, and their neo-Sufism will no doubt prove to be a hybrid phenomenon existing alongside other traits. The strong influence of modern Western thought, such as that of Nietzsche, must be taken into account. Finally, this thesis will consider in what respects these writers' aspirations have been realised, and to what extent their particular viewpoints are realistic and effective catalysts for cultural and political change in the Arab world. This chapter has demonstrated the importance of the Sufi state of *baqā'* and its parallels with Jung's individuation – but what role can it play in the creation of a just and democratic society? These are questions to which I will return in the conclusion after examining the work of each poet individually.

CHAPTER 1: THE VIRTUOUS CITY

THE DEVELOPMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ‘ABD AL-WAHHĀB AL-BAYYĀTĪ’S NEO-SUFISM

‘The poem is a form of spontaneous suffering in a moment’s unity of self and the world’¹⁷¹

“Therefore know yourselves, for you are the city, and the city is the kingdom”¹⁷²

This chapter will examine the development and significance of the Iraqi poet ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī’s (1926-99) use of Sufi concepts, symbols and personae, from the early 1960s until 1999. A threefold methodology will be used: firstly, exploration of the distinct role and character of Sufism in al-Bayyātī’s work; secondly, analysis of his influences and preoccupations – ideological, theoretical or literary – and examination of their relative compatibility with mysticism; and thirdly, analysis of individual poems. In particular, the objective is to ascertain how the poet reconciled his radical early convictions into a more balanced and mature totality with “neo-Sufi” overtones. Examples from 38 specifically selected poems will be cited to illustrate the answers to the essential questions: why did al-Bayyātī increasingly turn to mystical and mythological ideas, and how successfully does he integrate them into a cohesive whole? Given the radical tone of his writings, the aim is to determine to what extent al-Bayyātī may be characterised as an exponent of a ‘revolutionary esoteric’ school of modern Arabic literature, i.e. fusing inner and outer revolution.

It would be erroneous to investigate al-Bayyātī’s use of Sufism in isolation from the other important themes in his life and work, with which it is without doubt closely related. The present analysis therefore considers these themes and their relation to Sufi ideas. All these themes – alienation and exile, existentialist concerns (mortality, meaning), collective issues (social and political justice, Communism, revolution, commitment), and love – have a bearing on the “neo-Sufi” inclination. In this way, it is hoped that a reliable picture will emerge of a poet whose life

¹⁷¹ Jean Dammo, *Banipal* 17 (2003), p. 35

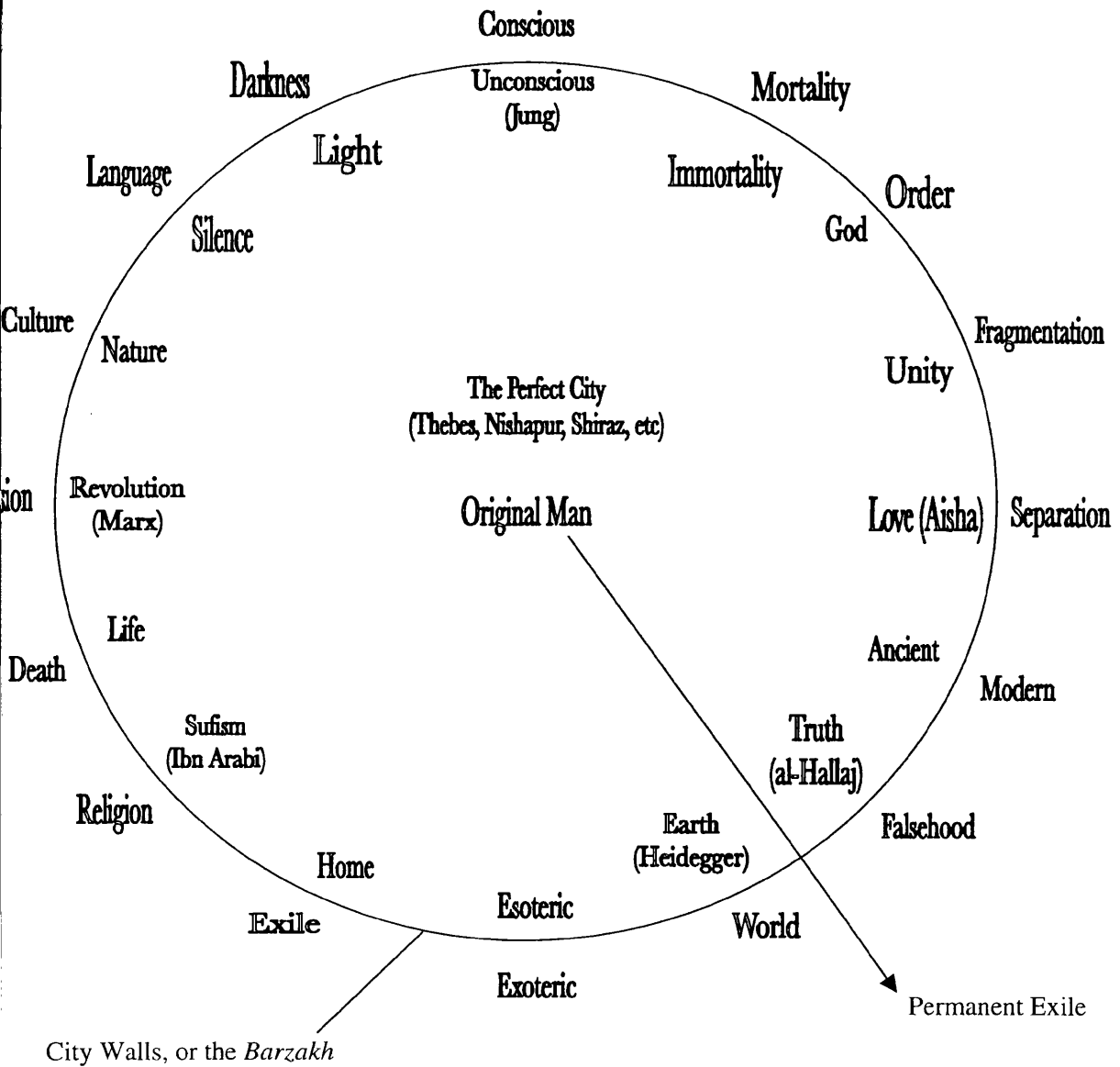
¹⁷² Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 35

was defined almost entirely by exile – a theme he came to internalise and theorise – and who was famed for his trenchant left-wing principles and commitment to the Arab future.

As will be demonstrated, the circular theme discussed in the introduction provides a highly appropriate framework through which to interpret al-Bayyātī's oeuvre and to establish the relative importance of Sufism therein. The *mandala* diagram overleaf – a variation on that depicted in the previous chapter – incorporates the principle motivating factors in al-Bayyātī's poetry, embodies its internally circular theme, and reflects his search for an elusive and impenetrable 'virtuous city' (*al-madīna al-fāḍila*) which is a function of his exilic state.

This 'forbidden circle' represents both the perfect city from which al-Bayyātī is forever exiled and the poet's psychic state of which that city is a metaphor. The significance of the *mandala* has already been established, and circular motifs – the ring, the whirlpool, the crown, the sun, the earth, the cycle of the seasons, the religious ritual of circumambulation (*tawāf*) – run through al-Bayyātī's poetry.

al-Bayyātī's perfect city / The Forbidden Circle



The following are two examples of this circular imagery and its psychological significance:

I split the orange of the sun into two
 Gave one half to the crow of separation
 And the other I threw in the sea
 The sea burst into flames, but my beloved did not return

To put together the two halves with me.¹⁷³

And:

‘Ashtarūt weeps over the Euphrates

Searching in its depths for a lost ring and a dying song...¹⁷⁴

The frequent references to circularity – the perfect expression of wholeness – have multiple references. For the poet it comes to symbolise not only the attempt to regain a lost unity but also a desire to transcend the endless cycle of life and death that constitutes existence, revealing al-Bayyātī’s preoccupation with immortality. They also represent interconnection or interexistence, confirming that each constituent theme has equal and related importance in al-Bayyātī’s work. And of course the circle, the complete, reunited being, is the goal of the Sufi. There is a connection here with the circularity of the *ṭawāf*, the ritual through which man links his temporal earthly existence to the divine cosmic eternity, and thus finds meaning. Al-Bayyātī’s use of *ṭawāf* imagery leaves little doubt as to his recognition of its symbolic power:

I hid my face in my hands

And saw

‘Ā’isha circling the black stone in her shroud¹⁷⁵

This ritual remained with him until the very end, when he wrote:

It seems I have been struck

By fear and madness

Since I no longer remember

My journey with Muḥy al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī

To Mecca, or my circling with him around the Ka‘ba¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ al-Bayyātī, *Qaṣā'id Ḥubb 'alā Bawābāt al-'Alam al-Sab'*, (Wizārat al-I'lām, Baghdād, 1971), p. 67

¹⁷⁴ al-Bayyātī, *Diwān*, (Dār al-'Awda, Beirut, 1971) p. 134

¹⁷⁵ al-Bayyātī, *Qaṣā'id Ḥubb*, p. 94

¹⁷⁶ al-Bayyātī, *Nuṣūṣ Sharqiyya* (al-Madā, Cyprus, 1999), p. 89

The numerical function of the circle is Π , the irrational symbol of infinity and therefore immortality. The ever-present theme in al-Bayyātī's work is endless search for the unattainable, that which is always beyond man's grasp, "that which comes and does not come", leaving him a confused and tragic exile. The circle's unitive structure transcends the duality of cause and effect, or beginning and end, which belong to the rational perspective. It involves no hierarchy: each constituent occupies an equal and interconnected place, allowing it to symbolise both al-Bayyātī's Communist beliefs and neo-mystical inclination. The circle is also the symbol of the sun, the source of all life and energy, object of the ancient pagan rites to which al-Bayyātī so often alludes. As noted previously, the sun and its rays are a classic model for understanding Sufism: the former represents God in Himself (the 'Essence') and the latter His attributes. The Sufi symbol *ʿAin Shams*, ibn al-ʿArabī's beloved, is the "eye of the sun".¹⁷⁷ In Sufi teaching, the word *ʿain* – 'eye' or 'source' – comes to signify 'the essence of God's quintessence'.¹⁷⁸ The notion of *ʿAin Shams*, the eye or source of the sun, is therefore a reference to God, the Absolute, the ultimate point on the mystical path. In this ambiguous language, erotic in form but potentially mystical in meaning, two distinct identities can dissolve into one:

[a time will come] when *ʿĀ'isha* will rise from beneath the wild grasses and black stones, a golden gazelle fleeing from me as beneath the vine. I seize her, undress her, and see my nakedness. You were my mirror; I have become the mirror.¹⁷⁹

Each name I say is her name
 Each house I lament in the morning is her house
 One is unified with all¹⁸⁰

Here al-Bayyātī uses Sufi language both as a romantic expression and as a search for truth and justice, the two ultimately embodying the same process of unification and arrival at the absolute moment:

Here are you on the bed

¹⁷⁷ al-Bayyātī's later autobiographical work is also entitled *Yanābīʿ al-Shams*

¹⁷⁸ J. Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*, (I.B. Tauris, London, 2000), p. 41

¹⁷⁹ al-Bayyātī, *Hubb wa Mawt wa Nafy: Love, Death and Exile*, tr. B. Frangieh (Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C., 1990), p. 250

¹⁸⁰ al-Bayyātī, *Qaṣā'id Ḥubb*, p. 12

In the circle of magic
 In my kingdom
 A gazelle moaning beneath the passion of kisses.
 Your hair like fire in the forest
 Which of us reached out a drowning hand to the other?¹⁸¹

For this highly committed poet, the circle's many references include the indispensable symbol of revolution. The cyclical nature of existence is evident in a poem such as *The Birth and Death of ʿĀ'isha*, which progresses from death to rebirth back to death, or *Lament for Ḥāfiẓ of Shīrāz*, which ends in the familiar theme of rebirth after death:

By the cup of immortal wine you were cured
 My agony increased
 Sleep came over me
 I cried out: here is autumn
 Spreading through the gardens of the gods
 Leaving in its wake the fires of birth.¹⁸²

Man began his psychic journey in the womb of the unconscious, i.e. the garden of Paradise, stationed securely in the centre of this cosmic unity. Then comes his expulsion from the magic circle, the fall from nature to culture, and the alienation and perpetual exile of the external order. In al-Bayyātī's case, he therefore becomes engaged in a tragic quest to rediscover this original purity, symbolised by his vision of the unknown, perfect city (Thebes, Nishapur, Babel, Shiraz, the 'city of love', etc) or by another favourite metaphor, the orchard. He repeatedly discovers himself forbidden from entering this city, i.e. from crossing the circumference of the circle back into unity, which is precisely the goal of mysticism:

We were in exile: each living our own exile, wearing shrouds
 Searching from one place to the next for meaning, and in the book of Exodus
 We couldn't find the orchard's gate¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ al-Bayyātī, *Bukā'iyya ilā Ḥāfiẓ al-Shīrāzī*, (Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyya, Beirut, 1999), pp. 21-2

¹⁸² al-Bayyātī, *ibid.*, p. 24

¹⁸³ al-Bayyātī, *Qaṣā'id Hubb*, p. 97

Instead, he is condemned to wander endlessly around the walls of the city in the hope that God, in His mercy and compassion, will one day allow him in. This is al-Bayyātī's primary reason for the use of religious archetypes and ideas. God, love, truth, justice: all these are absolute ideals lying inside the city, enclosed, intangible. The poet is painfully aware that, due to his physical existence, mankind's fate is exile, the denial of unity:

And when I return at the end of the road I see the day has come again, to leave me solitary at the beginning of a new road, beneath the sky of cities whose people have left them and departed: in front of the gate of Thebes, or Babel... There the Sphinx asks me: "What walks on four legs in the morning, two in the day and three in the evening?" I reply: "Man – when he is a child he crawls on his hands and feet, when he grows up he walks on two feet, but when he grows old he moves with difficulty and leans on a stick." When the Sphinx hears my answer, he is not grief-stricken, nor does he commit suicide by throwing himself from a rock as in the legend, but instead he debars me from entering Thebes and I am left at its gates, a martyr and an exile.¹⁸⁴

This 'new Nishapur', the city of social justice and equality – a testimony to al-Bayyātī's Communist convictions – appears time and again throughout his poetry. Here, the Sufi experience, which transcends the physical world, is a potential means of entry.

Naturally, al-Bayyātī attempts to write through the *barzakh*, or circumference, despite its being an impossible task. He speaks of writing at the foot of the city walls, searching for a way in. The great Sufis, such as ibn al-ʿArabī or ʿAṭṭār, were able to scale these walls and look over into the city itself, i.e. to contemplate God. But when al-Bayyātī assumes the mask of ibn al-ʿArabī, his lover ʿAin Shams abandons him to exile:

We possessed each other under the Eastern sky
 We gave each other roses as we prayed in the kingdom of the Lord,
 Waiting for the lightning.
 But she returned to Damascus
 With the birds and the dawn light

¹⁸⁴ al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī al-Shiʿriyya*, (al-Muʿassassa al-ʿArabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, Amman, 3rd ed, 1994), pp. 48-9

Leaving her slave in exile¹⁸⁵

The Sufi path, then, is one path that leads back to the Garden, or through the city walls. Al-Bayyātī's detractors – political opponents, critics, the cruelty and tyranny of the world – play the role of guards preventing his entrance. The poet's aim, despite the variety of his portrayals of it, is the one inner truth, the secret of existence without which he cannot live, but which signifies his death. All externalities, he discovers, are but obstacles in his way. There is a clear overlap between his poetic mission and the spiritual-psychological quest that is the inner content of the religious life.

Due to his own particular misfortunes, al-Bayyātī was acutely sensitive to man's insurmountable exile that seems to sidestep every attempt to overcome it, just when salvation seems at hand. Such is the fate of al-Bayyātī's al-Khayyām in his pursuit of his beloved °Ā'isha in *That which comes and does not come*:

°Ā'isha has no place here
 She is with time, in time,
 Lost like the wind in the wasteland
 Like the morning star in the evening
 So go back to Nishapur
 To her other face, you drunkard
 Go back and rebel against the tyrants and blind gods
 Against meaningless death and fate.¹⁸⁶

Al-Bayyātī sees the human condition as being condemned to exile – equivalent to a psychologically split self – which is surmountable only through love or death. Both of these can be interpreted along Sufi lines, as *'ishq* and *fanā'* respectively. The ultimate aim of the journey back into the circle, as al-Bayyātī himself acknowledges in his autobiography, is immortality, the final victory over death.¹⁸⁷ The poet is constantly seeking ways of making his existence permanent, so that he can be reborn in every new age. In the desperate attempt to enter the city,

¹⁸⁵ al-Bayyātī, *Qasā'id Ḥubb*, pp. 16-7

¹⁸⁶ al-Bayyātī, *Diwān*, p. 108

¹⁸⁷ al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī*, p. 23

or to reach full selfhood, the written word ultimately proves insufficient. The ‘kingdom of poetry’ – another variation on the forbidden circle theme – envisioned by the poet is nothing but a mirage, an existential paradox. However much the poet wishes, poetry cannot be the route to eternal life, since the self is not made out of words. Language, as the *mandala* shows, is itself by definition exiled from the holy city, beyond the *barzakh*. With the failure of poetry and language, al-Bayyātī is left with only with love and death, and the terrifying thought of silence that so contravenes his rebellious instincts.

The equidistant placement of the components of the *mandala* demonstrates the complementary yet opposite relationship between them, reflecting the web of themes running through al-Bayyātī’s poetry. Seen from the esoteric perspective, opposites are not only contradictory but also complementary. Each theme has not only its explicit opposite lying immediately the other side of the circumference, or *barzakh*, but also its equivalent in the corresponding position on the other side, revealing the particular internal structure between four given themes. For example, separation and oppression stand against love and revolution, with the poet caught in the overwhelming clash of opposites. Jung observes that it is precisely this problem of opposites that leads to psychic disintegration, chaos and neurosis,¹⁸⁸ and it is within this web of contradictory values that the poet searches for meaning. Al-Bayyātī’s *mandala*, then, reveals eight such pairs of polarities, which stand in mutual substantiation, and through analysis of which we may interpret his predicament.

Fragmentation – Death	Oppression – Separation	Conscious – Exoteric	Mortality – Exile
Unity – Life	Revolution – Love	Unconscious – Esoteric	Immortality – Home
Order – Religion	Culture – Modern	Darkness – World	Language – Falsehood
God – Sufism	Nature – Ancient	Light – Earth	Silence – Truth

¹⁸⁸ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 387

The Polarities of the Forbidden Circle

Examination of these parallels and polarities with regard to al-Bayyātī will illustrate how each theme becomes part of his integrated poetic quest, and will thereby help to ascertain and evaluate the position of mysticism within his life and work. In particular, his “neo-Sufi” credentials will depend on his position vis-à-vis the definitive exoteric/esoteric dialectic.

Fragmentation – Death

Unity – Life

Al-Bayyātī described himself as living his own death: ‘I say that I have died for seventy years, so why should I be afraid of death?’¹⁸⁹ He lived this death both through his own traumas in exile and vicariously through the suffering of his fellow Arabs. The irony that death might be the key to immortality was not lost on him; on the contrary, it becomes a central theme in his work:

Innovation is love

And love is death

And innovation, love and death are all birth¹⁹⁰

The same idea is expressed when he recasts himself as al-Ḥallāj:

And now I sleep

Waiting for the dawn of my salvation, the moment of execution.¹⁹¹

Moreover, he sometimes seems to acknowledge that perfection and life are mutually exclusive:

You have arrived before the time of the banquet

And after the guests have dispersed.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ al-Bayyātī, quoted from www.kitabat.com

¹⁹⁰ al-Bayyātī, *Bustān ‘Ā’isha* (Dār al-Shurūq, Beirut, 1989), p. 41

¹⁹¹ al-Bayyātī, *Sifr al-Faqr wa al-Thawra*, (Dār al-Ādāb, Beirut, 1965), p. 24

¹⁹² al-Bayyātī, *Qaṣā’id Hubb*, p. 65

Such a view was also prevalent among Sufis, who mostly believed that human salvation – complete union with the divine – was beyond man’s reach. If perfection can be reached through death, al-Bayyātī searches for the *fanā*’-esque “Death in Life” – to quote the title of one of his volumes – as if to overcome or reclaim the ubiquitous death that he lived on a personal, national and super-national level. The cyclical theme in his poetry posits a unity between death and rebirth, just as the Sufi *fanā*’ that entails rebirth onto a new and more illuminated plane. In the grip of the rebirth archetype, this becomes his perennial desire:

Things fall apart
Suns and moons explode
The flood washes away this ignominy
We are born in Madrid
Beneath the sky of a new world¹⁹³

Fragmentation and death are psychic equivalents here, as are the unity and life that might yet emerge from them. The prevalence of the fragmentation motif in al-Bayyātī’s poetry reflects both the breakdown of the time in which he lives, with its political upheavals and spiritual abyss, and the consequent disintegration of his own self into a void of meaninglessness and despair. The image of the poet ‘prolonging [his] death’,¹⁹⁴ outside the city reflects this psychic fragmentation: he knows that inside the city his heart would be reunited into a complete whole, whether through the emotional union of the lover or the mystical union of the Sufi, whose imagery and vocabulary are appropriated by the modern secular poet:

I scream, but in all the journeys to and from you I wonder about you, both in drunkenness and sobriety.
Become me, oh my beloved, pawn your rags for wine and weep, mad with love.¹⁹⁵

The tragic aspect issues from the fact that both these unions perpetually elude him and, although he never fully succumbs to despair, the negative sides of these polarities prevail, leaving him face to face with his inevitable human finitude:

¹⁹³ al-Bayyātī, *Dīwān*, p. 162

¹⁹⁴ al-Bayyātī, *Ḥubb wa Mawt*, p. 176

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 254

Give me wine and lay me down in my madness beneath the vine, for living death lurks in the taverns and markets and in the eyes of this cupbearer who plunges a knife into my chest.¹⁹⁶

His search for immortal life is couched in various analogous and often interchangeable metaphors – light, birth, revolution, etc – in which Sufism, the search for unity, can also be counted. Al-Bayyātī does not take Sufism so much at face value, but as a figurative expression of his inner suffering and search for salvation, something he is at pains to clarify:

...if there are some poets who approach *taṣawwuf* by way of imitating its philosophy, I am not one of those. For my *taṣawwuf* [...] is part of my poetic vision and my being is burnt into it [...] I do not strive for God's Kingdom in the Afterworld, but I work for the Kingdom of God and Man in this world [...] *taṣawwuf* does not mean for me wearing wool or becoming a dervish or dwelling at meditation circles. Rather, it means absolving oneself of selfishness, hatred, harm, and evil and entering the union with the spirit of this world and with the music of this universe that manifest themselves in the poem that becomes a being glorifying truth, freedom, justice and supreme love.¹⁹⁷

In other words, al-Bayyātī stresses the importance of the mystical experience's poetic essence, which is prior to the exoteric institution and formalised rituals that Sufism later became. He searches not for secondary manifestations, but primary truth, the archetypal nature of man that precedes all exterior colourings and forms. Nevertheless, for someone of his ideological background this essence assumes certain mutually interchangeable meanings: love, justice, freedom, immortality. His attitude towards life and death evolves into a cyclical vision reminiscent even of Buddhist *karma*, as in this later poem:

A stone said to another:

“I'm not happy with my existence in this naked wall

My place is in the sultan's palace.”

Said the other: “friend,

You have been sentenced to death

Whether here or in the sultan's palace

For tomorrow this palace will be destroyed

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 248

¹⁹⁷ al-Bayyātī, quoted in Saadi A. Simawe, ‘The lives of the Sufi masters in ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī’s poetry, *JAL* 32 (2001), p. 126

Just as this wall will be
 By an order from the sultan's men
 To bring the game back to the start
 And reallocate the roles.”¹⁹⁸

Oppression – Separation

Revolution – Love

As a politically active poet, al-Bayyātī's concern for the poor and downtrodden of the world, and his commitment to the idea of revolution, reached a quasi-religious status. Against tyranny and oppression both locally and globally he posits his idealised revolution which he claimed, following his hero Ernesto Guevara, to be an expression of the deepest human emotion, love. So firm is al-Bayyātī's belief that removing oppression is the most human act and the highest calling that it becomes synonymous with his own personal salvation. Thus in the *mandala* scheme, which is itself in revolution around its axis (God), he must enter inside to reach the revolution he craves, to reach the “perfect city” that represents his Absolute. Initially at least, then, collective salvation (social justice, attainable through revolution) assumes equivalent status as individual salvation (union of the self, attainable through love or mysticism), just as it does in the *mandala*. The surest sign that revolution and religion are ultimately one symbol for al-Bayyātī comes in his self-designation as ‘imām of the poor’, which explicitly combines the political and the spiritual:

How silly she was
 Not to know that the one who kissed her
 And gave her a ring
 Was the imam of the poor.¹⁹⁹

His work therefore can lean towards a kind of mystical socialism, in which the circle of truth is the city of justice, if only it may be entered. This is why al-Ḥallāj, the revolutionary mystic, becomes such a powerful symbol. In 1965 his al-Ḥallāj says:

I was unified

¹⁹⁸ al-Bayyātī, *Bustān*, p. 93

¹⁹⁹ al-Bayyātī, *Nuṣūṣ*, p. 87

Embraced
 Blessed – you are I
 My wretchedness
 My lonesomeness
 And in the ruins of the city
 My poor brothers raised the cry
 And wept²⁰⁰

while a decade later al-Bayyātī reflects on al-Ḥallāj’s *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*, with the circular theme, centred around both the mystic himself and the symbol of mysticism, still prominent:

The poor all gathered around al-Ḥallāj and the fire
 In this night that was possessed by the fever of something
 That might or might not emerge from behind the walls.²⁰¹

For al-Bayyātī, the much hoped-for step beyond the walls into the circle will be the beginning of his self-regenerating revolution. But in the outer world, as for instance in 1958, this revolution forever eludes and betrays him, providing brief optimism followed by trenchant gloom. Beyond the Iraqi picture, meanwhile, the internally fragmented Arab nation was suffering successive humiliations at the hands of Western powers. His increasing disillusionment and despair in the hope of a just world, particularly after 1967, precipitates his inward turn towards a more esoteric revolution. Prior to this shift, the banners of Communism and Arab nationalism keep his political dreams to some extent alive, but these one-sided worldly ideologies – socio-economic and ethnic respectively – unravel in the unseemly schemes of power. However, rather than giving up on his leftist ideals, al-Bayyātī attempted to fuse them with mystical and mythological perspectives into a unified whole, which like the Sufi perfect man would be simultaneously exoteric and esoteric. This is evident in his exaltation of Palestinian martyrs, whose self-immolation for a political cause elevates it to a religious level. Here they transcend death and touch immortality; the strong mystical overtones are unmistakable:

He shines in the light of the lamp niche

²⁰⁰ al-Bayyātī, *Sifr*, p. 23

²⁰¹ al-Bayyātī, *Ḥubb wa Mawt*, p. 174

United in the essence of God
 He is not annihilated / like the peoples of the Earth
 In his revolution he defies death.²⁰²

If revolution is one side of salvation, then love is very much the other. Sufism places a strong emphasis on the notion of love, which is ‘the motive force for God’s creative activity’²⁰³, and classically considered one of its highest stations:

... the friends of God, by loving one another, bear witness to the reality of love... The lovers of God reach either unitive fusion with him (*ittiḥād*, a concept condemned in later Sufism), or the ‘station’ of experiencing God’s uniqueness (*tawḥīd*), which means reaching him, so that he seems both to be and not be in and through everything.²⁰⁴

Sufism is the symbol and enactment of love in al-Bayyātī’s poetry; the two often become entirely interchangeable:

She became transformed into an apple, into wine
 A hot loaf
 In the sacred temple of love
 She became addicted to the sweet embrace
 She appeared in my dreams, I said: A butterfly
 Fluttered in the summer of my childhood
 Prematurely
 She transmigrated into every face
 And wandered – sleeping in my blood
 A saint fleeing in the darkness²⁰⁵

Love is personified throughout his work by the ephemeral anima figure of ‘Ā’isha, who possesses the divine qualities of simultaneous presence and absence. The poet describes ‘Ā’isha, the god-figure in his ‘religion of love’, as:

²⁰² al-Bayyātī, *Bustān*, p. 31

²⁰³ Chittick, *Sufism*, p. 64

²⁰⁴ Baldick, *op.cit*, p. 57

²⁰⁵ al-Bayyātī, *Bustān*, p. 51

the individual and collective symbol for love which have been united with each other and ultimately dissolved into the constantly revitalized spirit of being. °Ā'isha, who Orpheus, Dīk al-Jinn and Abū Firās chase endlessly as children chase butterflies... is always elusive and slippery, like smoke or air, always appearing and disappearing, leaving her lovers searching for her in the hell of this world and in every age. This is °Ā'isha, nothing but the spirit of the world in its renewal through death, for the sake of revolution and love.²⁰⁶

The poet hopes to fuse his split self with another – °Ā'isha – to regain unity and recover his lost Reality. This occasions an immersion not only in mystical musings but in a wholehearted and neverending search for love, and °Ā'isha, his imperishable romantic symbol, becomes, in the poet's own words, 'the twin of Sufism'. In her different guises she blends into a definition of Sufism itself: she is a surreal and fleeting image that transcends boundaries of time, place and identity and, like the circle/city, is always just beyond reach. These are merely different metaphors for al-Bayyātī's fundamental aim of entering this interdicted state, which at times he calls the 'virtuous city', *al-madīna al-fāḍila*, and at others the 'city of love', *madīnat al-°ishq*:

He dug a claw and a tooth into the flesh of the nights,
Made a pilgrimage to the city of love²⁰⁷

Separation is the diametrical opposite to love in both mystical and emotional senses since it entails a gap or abyss between two entities that require a *barzakh*, a bridge:

Perhaps the polar star
Will become a bridge for me over the infernal river of love²⁰⁸

This separation is usually couched in terms of the city walls patrolled by the Sphinx, or 'the wild beast that lurks / at the gate of the unknown'²⁰⁹, which can also function as metaphors for political adversaries and oppressive powers. The wall is the most potent symbol of separation: the

²⁰⁶ al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī*, pp. 45-6

²⁰⁷ al-Bayyātī, *Bustān*, p. 62

²⁰⁸ al-Bayyātī, *Qaṣā'id Ḥubb*, p. 92

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 146

poet stands in exile on one side, the symbols of unity – the virtuous city and the vanishing ‘Ā’isha, incarnated here as an elusive butterfly – on the other:

Light hung over the meadow in Shiraz
 A blue butterfly opened its gates and fluttered
 Over its wall and the face of the poor lover.
 He rose up to follow her, but she vanished behind the wall
 Leaving behind a trail of blood in the coppices of sunset
 I cried out to her:

‘Ā’isha!

‘Ā’isha! But she neither heard me

Nor saw the lover in his hell crawling towards the fire
 Waiting at the last gate.²¹⁰

Conscious – Exoteric

Unconscious – Esoteric

As hinted above, there is a distinct rupture in al-Bayyātī’s poetry in the 1960s, when it appears he underwent a particularly intense period of psychological trauma and began to discover that the solution to his question – often referred to in his poetry as the ‘secret’, a term laden with Sufi overtones – lay not in exoteric political ideology but in a modern esoterism. The emphasis therefore shifts gradually away from political commitment towards more personal and spiritual concerns. He emerges from this creative bottleneck a more complete artist, aware of both sides of existence and the relationship between them. His goal then effectively becomes that of the mystic: to discover the secret through which these two realities – the expressible and the inexpressible – may be dialectically fused into one, so that the ‘finite being’ can ascend to infinitude. His answer, usually, is love:

On the last day, I told her:
 You are the fire of the forests,
 The water of the river,
 The secret of fire

²¹⁰ Ibid, p. 69

Half of you: inexpressible

The other half: a priestess in the temple of ʿIshtār.²¹¹

The quest for this eternal secret repeatedly recurs, symbolically alluded to by the ring, the gate, the door, and so on. As the quest for the secret possessed him, he was not unaware of the doctrinal centrality of the ‘secret’ in Sufism, which according to one modern writer:

... continues to have great importance up to our own time. In particular, it is often repeated that God’s attribute of Lordship (*rubūbiyya*) has a secret which, if revealed, would nullify that Lordship itself.²¹²

Al-Bayyātī, too, senses the paradox of the secret: to discover it is to nullify it. The virtuous city for which he searches may in fact be merely a mirage, just as ʿĀ’isha is no more than smoke and air. He can only lament that ‘we could not find the orchard’s gate’²¹³ or admit that Damascus – resting place of ibn al-ʿArabī – is always near but perpetually out of reach.²¹⁴

Confronted with the problem of opposites – between the invisible, intangible esoteric domain and the visible, physical exoteric domain – al-Bayyātī increasingly attempts to synthesize the two rather than to achieve the impossible and pass fully into the esoteric. In his capacity as a modern, secular thinker, he knows that he must live in the exoteric, wherein lie his socio-political concerns. However, his crisis effectively inverts this viewpoint, calling into question his existential preconceptions and compelling him to focus more on personal and metaphysical issues such as love and spiritual salvation. Hereafter, in contrast to the radical separation of religion and politics, a unitive picture gradually emerges in which revolution means love, love means life, and life means revolution. The poet acknowledges the circularity of their mutual value as he seeks to create his poetic kingdom:

You are here with me in the depths

Escorting the cycle of seasons

In the poem of the body.²¹⁵

²¹¹ al-Bayyātī, *Bustān*, p. 88

²¹² Baldick, *op.cit*, p. 52

²¹³ al-Bayyātī, *Qaṣā'id Ḥubb*, p. 97

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 19

²¹⁵ al-Bayyātī, *Bukā'iyya*, p. 22

Mortality – Exile

Immortality – Home

No one knows anyone in this exile

All are solitary

The heart of the world is a stone

In this kingdom of exile.²¹⁶

Exile is perhaps al-Bayyātī's central theme. He is a perpetual wanderer in the wilderness of separation. In his own stark assessment, 'Man is born in exile, lives in exile and dies in exile.'²¹⁷ Permanent severance from the holy city is the poetic metaphor for his feelings of physical, emotional and spiritual rupture, and his permanent sense of alienation and insecurity in the world. His work is replete with images of peripatetic existence, expressing his cumulative feelings of rootlessness: as a modern Iraqi, as an Arab, and as a human being and poet. This permanent exile is the shadow of man's mortality, since life wandering outside the city is but a prolonged and painful death:

Your cries were my cries as I scaled the walls of this earth's cities, departing in the snow, prolonging my death in the pagan lands of music, revolution and love, of God.²¹⁸

The exile longs for home: he longs to overcome his alienation and feel his roots stretching down into the earth. Like 'Ā'isha and the perfect city, 'home' is a fleeting dream for al-Bayyātī, disappearing as soon as it appears, as occurs most vividly in the third part of *The Birth and Death of 'Ā'isha*. So long as the key to the gates of Nishapur eludes him, the lonely wanderer can be sure of only one thing: that he will die. At the same time, the only answer to a life of exile is this death, the ultimate moment of deliverance. Only inside the city, beyond the door of death, can he realise the life and meaning he craves. To create 'the Kingdom of God and Man in this world' is an impossible task. This unbearable paradox shakes the poet to the very core of his being, since it implies a return to a religious perspective that cherishes the afterlife as God's kingdom.

²¹⁶ al-Bayyātī, *Ḥubb wa Mawt*, p. 206

²¹⁷ al-Bayyātī, quoted from www.kitabat.com

²¹⁸ al-Bayyātī, *Ḥubb wa Mawt*, p. 176

Exile permeates al-Bayyātī's whole being. On an ideological level, he is constantly wandering in search of the answer to man's suffering; spiritually, he wanders in search of fulfilment and union; existentially, in search of eternal life and meaning. Through this universal search the themes of death, mysticism and exile are inextricably linked:

Al-Ḥallāj would come back ill and sleep for years, dying repeatedly and shaking the stony bars of every prison of the world. He said "Farewell", and flowerbeds disappeared. Farewell, forests of the childhood of my love! Water will turn to tears and death to departure in this exile.²¹⁹

Order – Religion

God – Sufism

This set of parallels and polarities cuts to the heart of the subject of this thesis: the role of Sufism in the modern world. The institutional face of religion, the exoteric God, is synonymous here with the dominance of a certain Order, in contrast to the subversive, esoteric God of Sufism. The radical al-Bayyātī strives to transform the prevailing socio-political order and realign its foundations. Thus Sufism in al-Bayyātī's poetry effectively becomes the mirror image of the revolution, a metaphor for the pursuit of the freedom that is so lacking in the modern Arab reality. Like the revolution, Sufism for him is a symbol of equality and creativity. The suffering of Sufi characters in al-Bayyātī's poems reflects this dual objective: purification of the socio-political order and of the self, the two being ultimately indistinguishable:

I rave beside the wounded vessel and say: A time will come when man becomes mist for his brother (and lord of the heavens...), pawning his rags for wine and weeping, possessed by desire, a time when °Ā'isha will rise from beneath the wild grasses and black stones, a golden gazelle fleeing from me as from beneath the vine.²²⁰

The internal Sufi God inheres an individual freedom to define the divine on one's own terms, while the external, institutional God implies the oppressive strictures of power imposed on the

²¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 172-4

²²⁰ Ibid, p. 250

individual from above. Accordingly, the former is associated with the eternal and the latter with the temporal:

We shared bread and wrote poetry about visions of the poor, abandoned and hungry in the kingdom of the great mason, about the secret of the rebellion of the man who burned with desire for the light, who bowed his head before the tyrant sultan.²²¹

Religion and God are effectively strangers, separated by the dividing *barzakh*, the impenetrable city walls: the poet is free to find his own god once he has removed all traces of the old one. Al-Bayyātī explicitly invokes his own esoteric god, for example, in *Death and the Lamp*:

My language became a lamp at God's door. My life slipped between my fingers, took shape, and that shape became reality.²²²

Religious order inevitably involves a social hierarchy, contrary to the poet's cherished principle of human equality. This is true even in Islamic culture, where all men are supposedly equal before God, as well as in institutionalised Sufism. Aware that this 'order' is a societal construct based on relations of power, al-Bayyātī's innate inclination is to undermine or transcend this hierarchy. This is one of his central motivations: to create a kingdom in this world, even if merely a poetic one, where all men will be truly equal.

In the underworld beneath this enchanted hill
 For the fire and the magic rites
 For the body of the earth that is resurrected beneath the kisses of summer, for
 the Euphrates
 I bear the scars of captivity's whip
 In the kingdom of the Lord
 And the kingdom of man.²²³

²²¹ Ibid, p. 172

²²² Ibid, p. 182

²²³ al-Bayyātī, *Qaṣā'id Ḥubb*, pp. 143-4

Thus he rejects exoteric religion, with its stratifying and dehumanising tendencies and its permanent separation of man and God, in contrast to the esoteric, in which the Absolute is theoretically attainable. This is reflected in al-Bayyātī's perfect city, within which lie Sufism / God, identifiable as man's true nature. Order / Religion, conversely, lie outside, since they are extraneous and unnecessary for the fulfilment of inner perfection. Such a scheme reflects the nature of al-Bayyātī's heroes, such as the sublimely individualistic al-Ḥallāj who saw no boundary between his own purification and social justice. For him, as for al-Bayyātī, the apparent paradox belied an inner continuity.

Al-Ḥallāj's transgression of Islamic rituals and his heretical concept of *ṭawāf* around the *ka'ba* of the heart signal a desire to go beyond outer actions towards inner meaning. Al-Bayyātī's relentless wandering around the city walls is undoubtedly his own version of this *ṭawāf*. Exoteric religion, as Jung noted, separates the individual from the original vitality and dynamism of its essence, thus curtailing spiritual freedom. To the true mystic only the inner essence of love is important, an idea that al-Bayyātī tries to capture by stripping himself of everything, leaving nothing between himself and God:

Take the sunflower
 Who lays her cheek down on mine
 Take the memories of the childhood of my love
 Take my books, my death
 My voice will remain
 A lamp at God's door.²²⁴

Sufism is the mystical act of love, the 'way of the heart'. In al-Bayyātī's later life, love gains almost total dominance and becomes his 'religion', increasingly representing not only a means of entering the city – and reaching psychological balance – but a blissful escape from life's travails. Both love and Sufism involve a restoration of the heart towards its original Adamic unity, a fusion of the split self with the beloved/Beloved. Their poetic imagery are therefore identical and ambiguous, allowing al-Bayyātī, like the Sufi poets before him, to speak on many levels simultaneously. Sufism and love both entail completion: the union of the two broken halves,

²²⁴ al-Bayyātī, *Ḥubb wa Mawt*, p. 182

which for the Sufi is the all-encompassing key to immortality. As noted above, however, al-Bayyātī's vision of union, to be achieved through love and revolution, constantly eludes him:

The sea burst into flames, but my beloved did not return
To put together the two halves with me.²²⁵

Culture – Modern

Nature – Ancient

In an apparent paradox, al-Bayyātī, the progressive thinker who was integral to the modernist movement in Arabic poetry, harks back to the ancient times of ancient rites and natural order. Living in the modern era, al-Bayyātī comes to feel an unmistakable sense of lacking, which is often expressed in terms of exile: despite, or because of, his acculturation, man has become somehow cut off from true selfhood. Adam, the original man, was ejected at the dawn of the human era from the Garden and condemned to a life of exile. References to this human condition of lost innocence are evident throughout al-Bayyātī's poetry: the virtuous city becomes the 'city of childhood', signifying the time of unconsciousness before entry into the symbolic order. As previously discussed, this relates closely to the Sufi's 'return' to *tawakkul*, depending on God as the child depends on its mother. The city and the concept of childhood thus become psychologically analogous for al-Bayyātī:

The Russian violinist's music in the corner of the bar,
I saw: the white cities of childhood in its melodies,
Rivers of ice and forests in the Urals²²⁶

Indeed, the poet's very progressiveness suggests a return to the origin, in keeping with the circular theme of individuation, like the Sufi's return to God. This explains the position of 'original man' at the centre of al-Bayyātī's *mandala*: the king, as it were, of the perfect city. Like the Sufi, the poet's is a move *through* culture – which for all its achievements brings alienation – back to nature, this circular progression leading to an original unconscious state of pre-fall bliss.

²²⁵ al-Bayyātī, *Qaṣā'id Ḥubb*, p. 667

²²⁶ Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī, *Sira Dhātīyya li-Sāriq al-Nār* (Wizārat al-I'lām, Baghdād, 1974), p. 76

In both poet and mystic, the same psychological need applies, the same transcendence of linear temporal constraints. Such ideas are couched in terms of original innocence, using images of primordial nakedness (whose ambiguity offers multiple interpretations) and elemental phenomena redolent of early man, such as fire. Concepts such as fire and nakedness can be interpreted both in a modern secular sense, signifying the suffering and denudation of modern man, and esoterically, as the burning away of the ego and subsequent proximity to God. In such a way, one senses the sublimation of psychological trauma into spiritual transcendence:

Here am I, naked as the desert sky
 Sad as a gypsy horse
 Consumed by fire.²²⁷

Nakedness carries connotations of a primordial sexual union in which lover and beloved coalesce as part of the earth's ancient mysticism. Al-Bayyātī's orchard symbol, a recurring and more romantic variation on the virtuous city theme, implies humanity's subordination to the divinity of nature:

When we meet tomorrow in the orchard of love
 I will strip you naked
 And cover your body in roses
 And kiss you on every rose.²²⁸

Al-Bayyātī taps into ancient conceptions of the poet as a natural mystic with super-sensory powers. This shift from a highly political agenda to the pre-Socratic and pre-Islamic conception of the true role of the poet as visionary and seer is perhaps an example of Adonis' influence. The natural (as opposed to cultural) poet possesses powers akin to those of the mystic, the two often being combined in the same person, as with the great Sufi poets, Rūmī , °Aṭṭār and so on.

The poet's alienation is manifestly a symptom of modern civilization, which for him has left the Arab nation perpetually teetering on the brink of the abyss of being and nothingness. These existential concerns and his reaction to this aspect of modernity lead directly into his esoteric

²²⁷ al-Bayyātī, *Ḥubb wa Mawt*, p. 178

²²⁸ al-Bayyātī, *Nuṣūṣ*, p. 82

orientation. Typical symbols of the new, disturbing reality are the sprawling, chaotic quagmires of the modern city, where the poet's feelings of isolation and anxiety reach their apex. The city is corrupt, the locus of lost innocence. Baghdad had become a place whose great civilizations 'had died and disappeared for ever'²²⁹. His revulsion of the city and exaltation of rurality corresponds to the psychological need to return to a more natural mode of existence. Original, natural man had been ejected from the Garden and was now being hounded from city to city, always on the run:

He chases me mercilessly
 He blocks me in the darkness
 The streets of these cities that slept starless
 He looks at me from my cup²³⁰

The desire for the eternal in man – both ancient and modern – occurs in al-Bayyātī's poetry not only through Sufi ideas, but also through extensive use of ancient ideas and symbols – paganism, rituals, magic charms, talismans. Psychologically speaking, these are also the 'twin of Sufism', and a potent means of rediscovering the lost innocence from which the city walls separate him. In particular, the ancient is expressed through his renewal of the Babylonian, Sumerian and Assyrian gods and legends, whose heroines, °Ishtār or °Ashtarūt, metamorphose into one another, fusing identities and trajectories with al-Bayyātī's dominant romantic symbol, °Ā'isha.

Darkness – Light

World – Earth

Throughout al-Bayyātī's career, the virtuous city is depicted as a place of light, a powerful symbol of the divine in classical Sufism, which generally sees Muḥammad and the Qur'ān as the 'guiding lights in the darkness of unreal things'.²³¹ The title of one poem refers to the 'light that comes from Granada', the Andalusian city of enlightenment, or, in another poem referring explicitly to Sufism:

²²⁹ al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī*, pp. 19-20

²³⁰ al-Bayyātī, *Sifr*, p. 83

²³¹ Chittick, *Sufism*, p. 13

[My father] taught me: departure,
 Sadness and walking
 Around the homes of God's friends,
 Searching for light and the warmth of a future spring
 That still lies in the inner earth and seashells
 Waiting for the seer's prophecy.²³²

By contrast, exile is a state of blindness or darkness, which is redolent of ignorance, oppression and death. In Sufism, the transition from darkness to light symbolises the ascent from body to spirit.²³³ Similarly, al-Bayyātī aspires to move from blindness to vision:

Blind, and yet you see with the eyes of words
 You verify the mirror by touch
 And the shelves of books that drown in light²³⁴

The world, as defined by Heidegger, is the domain of society and culture, a man-made and man-oriented, exoteric environment. Its counterpart, the earth, is the esoteric domain in which nature, rather than man, is the subject. Heidegger's use of eastern mystical sources in his philosophy is well attested. For al-Bayyātī, the world represents the realm of exile and darkness, or in Sufi terms, the unreal or nonexistent. The poet appears to oscillate between his outer social concerns and an attempt to give it an esoteric colouring: to make social justice his God, somewhat along the lines of Jung's *participation mystique*. In this sense he fluctuates between world and earth, trying to unify the two into one. This reciprocity between world and earth produces interface (*barzakh*) symbols, such as the temple, as in this description of ʿĀ'isha:

Searching for my face and tresses in the magic cities
 And in the priests' spells in the temples of twilight²³⁵

Here the duality of the describable and indescribable is portrayed in similar terms:

²³² ʿ Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī, *al-Kitāba ʿalā al-Ṭīn*, (Dār al-Ādāb, Beirut, 1970) p. 89

²³³ Chittick, *Sufism*, p. 86

²³⁴ al-Bayyātī, *Bustān*, p. 33

²³⁵ al-Bayyātī, *Qaṣā'id Hubb*, p. 137

Half of you: inexpressible

The other half: a priestess in the temple of ʿIshtār.²³⁶

Al-Bayyātī's veneration of the earth as a life-sustaining organism in which humanity takes its place emerges through his quasi-pantheistic references to earthly phenomena such as trees, forests, rivers, mountains, sea, and sky, as well as the earth itself:

And when he kissed me: I felt the earth spinning around twice, rain fell

I was running in a forest, my hair dishevelled

Barefoot on a carpet of golden sky and flowers

In the forest of magic²³⁷

In his incarnation as al-Khayyām, he conceives of death in terms of the all-important return to the Earth in the familiar unending cycle of life, death and rebirth, blurring the conceptual boundaries between earth, mother and God.

We will return, who knows, or not

To our mother Earth who bears the embryo

of this hope in her bowels

And the depth of this sadness and promises

The butterfly of existence hovers around our fire.²³⁸

Language – Falsehood

Silence – Truth

Although language is inescapably the poet's tool and medium of expression, it entails an exile by its very nature. Al-Bayyātī's search for psychological salvation mirrors the search for the transcendental signifier; both seem destined to be fruitless. If the walls of *al-madīna al-fāḍila*, the virtuous city, represent the *barzakh*, or gap between exoteric and esoteric, the poet is denied entry by the very poetic utterances that make him what he is. In this cruel paradox, language – the

²³⁶ al-Bayyātī, *Bustān*, p. 87

²³⁷ al-Bayyātī, *Dīwān*, p. 149

²³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 134

poet's lifeblood – is exiled from truth, leaving him with a terrifying choice between words and silence.

As noted above, love, death and silence are al-Bayyātī's three possible paths to salvation. Silence is the meditative, asocial option, the frontier of Eastern mysticism, but al-Bayyātī cannot bring himself to contemplate something synonymous with defeat and acquiescence. In the grip of this tortuous dilemma, he describes how his mouth has been sealed by 'the wax of silence'²³⁹, or wonders:

Why are words exiled? Why does love turn to agony? Why is silence torment
in this exile, why do words become lifebuoys
for those who drown in this wave haunted by the chaos of things?²⁴⁰

Or, even more succinctly:

Exile is my homeland
Words are my exile.²⁴¹

The poem, which he describes as 'my only weapon', thus only deepens his devastating sense of alienation. Conversely, the esoteric realm of silence may say more than words ever can: silence can sometimes say more than the loudest declamation. Sometimes, then, he displays a reverence for it that belies his customary abhorrence:

He used to love the sultan's daughter
He lived on the riverbanks of her voice
Of her silence
But she died – like a white butterfly in the fields
Dies at sundown
He went mad at her death
Taking refuge in silence and glorifying only her name²⁴²

²³⁹ al-Bayyātī, *Qaṣā'id Ḥubb*, p. 99

²⁴⁰ al-Bayyātī, *Ḥubb wa Mawt*, p. 174

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 180

Al-Bayyātī seems unsure whether silence is part of God’s realm or a symptom of his oppression. In Sufi terms, too, silence is paradoxical: distance from God is a spiritual muteness and proximity to God lights the fire of poetic creativity, yet also identification with God overcomes the need for language. When the poet talks of ‘a blind musician [bleeding] over the strings, raising his hand like me in the silence of the void of things, searching for what he has lost, circling alone around God’²⁴³, the void seems to refer to the abyss of exile rather than the silent realm of truth.

The poet’s ambiguous attitude towards silence reflects his inability to fully reconcile himself with the esoteric mode. For him the real world is the one in which people must live, regardless of its truth-value. Nevertheless, by the 1970s, his breathless early productivity had waned, as he perhaps came to believe that only death would bring his desired immortality. As the idealistic vision of the perfect city increasingly proves elusive, his former political passion appears to yield to an attitude of acceptance and a slight reduction in his appetite for poetic expression.

While a wholeheartedly meditative existence does not appear to suit al-Bayyātī – he is in fact a hybrid of ‘East’ and ‘West’, heavily influenced from an early stage by influential figures in western literature, philosophy and politics, such as Marx and Camus – he remains an essentially Eastern poet. Following Shabistarī and Lāhijī, Chittick elucidates the symbolic notions of East and West in Sufism:

... each existent thing can be said to have two faces[:] the “eastern face” and the “western face”. If we look at the western face of things, we find no trace of the sun, since it has set. If we look at the eastern face of the same things, we see the sun shining in its full glory. Everything displays both faces at the same time, but the vast majority of people see only the western face. They have no awareness that everything is a sign of God in which He is disclosing His own reality... The prophets and the great Sufis see the eastern face. In their case, God has answered the prayer, “Show us things as they are.” For them, all things are truly and actually the signs of God.²⁴⁴

²⁴² al-Bayyātī, *Sifr*, p. 20-1

²⁴³ al-Bayyātī, *Ḥubb wa Mawt*, p. 234

²⁴⁴ Chittick, *Sufism*, pp. 13-14

In moving across these pairs of parallels and opposites, al-Bayyātī expresses his essential desire to graduate from a state of non-being (which entails lack, absence, exile, death, etc) to genuine being (God, justice, love, truth, etc). His poetry thus functions externally on a number of levels, each of which symbolise the same inner desire for transformation from one state to the other, i.e. from without to within the circle. Sufism – its archetypes, symbols and doctrines – is a metaphorical language of individuation, merely one of the various poetic expressions of this transformation. The poet never loses his desire to fuse his exoteric aims – social justice, revolution – with his esoteric aims – salvation and love – into an indistinguishable whole, and the language of Sufism fulfils this ambiguity. This synthesis of individual and collective emancipation recalls Marx’s statement that: ‘the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’.²⁴⁵ It is therefore worth examining how al-Bayyātī reconciles his broader preoccupations – notably Communism and existentialist thought – with this Sufi tendency.

²⁴⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (Orion, London, 1996), p. 36

Collective Issues: al-Bayyātī, Communism and Sufism

Al-Bayyātī's concern for the wretched of the earth and profound commitment to justice in the world found him a spiritual home in the Communist party, whose exoteric ideology reached quasi-religious status. In establishing to what extent these inclinations were compatible or otherwise with the "neo-Sufi" tendency, it becomes clear that the pivotal notion of the perfect city reveals a direct continuity between his Communism and esoterism.

His initial conviction that Communism would one day unlock the gates of this city of salvation, his ideal vision of human existence, yields in time to a more subtle and nuanced view.²⁴⁶ Nevertheless, al-Bayyātī finds himself expressing his more personal aspirations in very similar terms to his socio-political concerns: entry into the forbidden place. In both cases the important factor is the original ideal (esoteric), rather than the institution that inevitably follows (exoteric). Importantly, Communism's anti-religious appearance is not evidence of a conflict with Sufism: both movements evolved from the urge to reorder the world, but merely approached it from different angles. *The Communist Manifesto* itself points out that:

Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. Has not Christianity declaimed against private property, against marriage, against the State? Has it not preached in the place of these, charity and poverty, celibacy and mortification of the flesh, monastic life and Mother Church? Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat.²⁴⁷

Both the Communist and Sufi ideal uphold an ascetic, anarchic *modus vivendi* but vary in their interpretations. For the Communist, material wealth must be distributed equally; for the Sufi, material wealth is ultimately a barrier from the desired proximity to God. Marx's claim that 'the Communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations; no wonder that its development involves the most radical rupture with traditional ideas,'²⁴⁸ outwardly reflects the mystic's radical internal revolution and abandonment of worldly pleasures. If Sufism

²⁴⁶ It is revealing to note here that while al-Bayyātī remained a Communist, al-Sayyāb, his famous compatriot and fellow Communist, had rejected this ideology by the early 1960s, suggesting that, had he lived longer, the latter might have produced more "neo-Sufi" thought than al-Bayyātī himself.

²⁴⁷ Marx, op.cit., p. 39-40

²⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 34

is the key to the city gates, then obtaining this key requires relinquishing all worldly attributes, just as the true Communist relinquishes all personal property.

Further, both issue from a rejection of the *status quo* and a desire to transform it. For the Communist, total reform of the socio-economic structure of society is the key; for the Sufi, it is the inward structure of the psyche. Likewise the dissolution of boundaries: Communism was conceived as an all-encompassing system of equality, 'independently of all nationality',²⁴⁹ while the Sufi experience obliterates all that stands between man and God. Ideally, both Communists and Sufis view national or ethnic divisions as superfluous. The central Islamic doctrine of equality before God reveals an evident parallel to the Communist ideal. It is no surprise then that for al-Bayyātī, the self-styled 'imām of the poor', God and equality become effectively indistinguishable.

Connected to this dissolution of boundaries is, in both cases, the breakdown of ego-consciousness: for the *participation mystique* of Communism, in which the individual's uniqueness is subsumed in the ideal, classless society, read the Sufi's abstraction (*tajrīd*) of his illusory selfhood 'as a snake sloughs off its skin'.²⁵⁰ 'Annihilation' of the ego in *fanā*' leads directly to 'subsistence' or 'survival' in *baqā*', the renewed sense of selfhood, which the Communist is supposed to find in the collective identity. Baldick points out that in *fanā*', 'one can see the celebrated 'negation of the negation', which is one of the distinguishing characteristics of dialectical thought and finds its ultimate development in the works of Hegel and Marx...'²⁵¹ For Jung, moreover, Communism is effectively a religion without the transcendental function, which is all the more dangerous as this is projected onto the state, leading only to precisely the corruption and oppression that the revolution set out to abolish. It is this realisation – conscious or otherwise – that pushes the poet away from exoteric ideology towards the truth of the self.

The implication, then, is that, just as the Communist loses his ego-status in the larger self, the poet must undergo a process equivalent to Sufi *fanā*' in order to reach *baqā*' and thereby enter

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 23

²⁵⁰ Baldick, *op.cit.*, p. 36

²⁵¹ Ibid, p. 45

the city. This is partly why he speaks in terms of Death in Life – his 1968 volume – ambiguously referring both to his self-proclaimed condition of living death and the *fanā'* that might overcome it. At the city gates the conscious meets the unconscious, and beyond this point man achieves true selfhood; in Sufi terms, he is *bāqī billāh*, 'subsisting in God'. The poet's deepest needs and anxieties, which he approached initially in Communist terms, are therefore structurally compatible with the stations of the Sufi path. This in turn allows him to express them in the form of poetic interpretations of historical Sufis' psychological torments:

I search for you in my drunkenness and my sobriety as long as the cupbearer's goblets speak without
tongues.

Oh spirit of this world's elements, of the silver-blue night lights
Here am I, prostrating myself drunkenly in Presence²⁵²

The most probable reason for the shift away from direct Communist sentiments is that, with their inherent structural difficulties and limitations of vision, these highly exoteric ideas lacked the means to express the poet's increasingly profound spiritual torment. Communist ideology paints a flat, denuded picture of man as a mere social component, insufficient for an exploration of the inner recesses of human nature. Moreover, after the critical mid-point in his life around 1963-4, al-Bayyātī seems far more aware of his own mortality, and personal concerns begin to take precedence over collective ones.

In place of Communism, Sufism begins to form a 'meta-ideology' for al-Bayyātī, something more subtle and profound than this supposedly all-encompassing solution. As the perpetual journeyman, his hope is that this path will take him to a new level of consciousness, thus overcoming his permanent exile, reversing his fallen status and restoring his split consciousnesses to a perfect, whole self:

Two nights I slept
In which I dreamt I was no longer two words
I was unified²⁵³

²⁵² al-Bayyātī, *Ḥubb wa Mawt*, p. 248

²⁵³ al-Bayyātī, *Sifr*, pp. 22-3

In the final analysis, then, al-Bayyātī's enduring commitment to Communism was only ever a barrier obstructing him from entering the city, despite his attempts to conflate the social and individual into one. In this sense, exoteric Communism, a collective, socio-economic view of human life, stood in direct contrast to the esoteric Sufi experience, which offered a more individual path to salvation.

Al-Bayyātī, Existentialism and Sufism

Through his total exile, al-Bayyātī comes to experience the predicament of modern man in its most acute form. He reaches a point of utter alienation: from his fellow men, from nature, but most significantly, from his own self and from God. Such is the concern of existentialist philosophy. For Heidegger, this alienation, or “fallen-ness” (*Verfallenheit*) entails contemplation of the abyss of nothingness, a fragmented and contingent state of non-being. If the ‘rampant extroversion’ of modern civilization has brought it to ‘the brink of the abyss’, the counterweight to this predicament must lie within the self. As noted, the psychological predicament of the Arab world after 1948 bears a distinct parallel to the development of existentialism after World War I: both were an emphatic end to innocence. In a godless world, man was confronted with the most profound existential question: the inevitability and finality of death. He now recognised that:

the timeless world, the eternal, has disappeared from the horizon of the modern writer as it has from the horizon of modern Existentialists like Sartre and Heidegger, and from the horizon of our own everyday life; and time thereby becomes all the more inexorable and absolute a reality. The temporal is the horizon of modern man, as the eternal was the horizon of the Middle Ages.²⁵⁴

In despair at this human finitude, al-Bayyātī desperately searches for a means to retrieve the eternal. If Sufism is the path from human temporality to divine eternity, it is therefore only natural that mystical ideas resurface in his work. As he puts it himself:

Finite beings carry the seeds of their own death with them, and they are weaker than nature, because they are divided unities. Therefore their existence ends with the end of their life on earth, leaving behind them: the artist-revolutionary – their inheritor and their son who defeats death for them – whom they make from their sweat, their blood, their suffering and their dreams of justice. The artist-revolutionary, then, is the embodiment of the will of fated, oppressed finite beings, and their extension across history through moments of regeneration towards a more perfect selfhood [i.e. infinitude].²⁵⁵

Al-Bayyātī’s attempts to conceive the infinite image of man in his poems corresponds to the ‘faceless and anonymous hero, who is at once everyman and nobody... everywhere exposed to

²⁵⁴ Barrett, op.cit, p. 53

²⁵⁵ al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī*, p. 46

Nothingness... threatened by the void,²⁵⁶ through which Western existentialist literature also tried to portray the definitive human image. This is perhaps best exemplified by his recreation of the Persian poet and polymath al-Khayyām, whose *rubāʿiyyāt* display deeply existentialist concerns. This persona, who is described in the subtitle to *Death in Life* as meditating ‘on being and nothingness’ (*al-wujūd wa-l-ʿadam*), reflects that:

We must choose
 We must seize the wind and turn the voids
 We must find the meaning behind the futility of life
 For life on this closed sphere is suicide.²⁵⁷

Al-Bayyātī’s move towards Sufism corresponds to the realisation of the existentialist philosophers – notably Nietzsche and Heidegger – that the rational, Enlightenment tradition is ultimately insufficient in the search for truth. The previous chapter discussed Nietzsche’s seminal influence on the modern generation of Arab poets, and al-Bayyātī was no exception: in 1971 he even wrote a poem entitled *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, calling for the Superman to descend from the mountain into the cities that ‘await the flood and conquest / and the fire of innovators.’²⁵⁸ If Heidegger sees man in the modern world as decisively alienated from, if surrounded by, Being (*Dasein*), the Sufi paradoxically views the world as separation from God, despite His presence in it. Both Existentialist philosophy and Sufism imply that the exoteric world is the realm of non-existence, thus turning rationality on its head and suggesting the need for purification. This explains man’s feelings of spiritual alienation, which for personal and political reasons culminated for al-Bayyātī from around the mid-1960s. A poem such as the following, then, can be interpreted as an expression of this inversion of reality, recalling two Qur’ānic verses of particular significance in the Sufi tradition, 2:115 (“Wherever you turn, there is the face of God”) and 55:26-7 (“Everything on earth is annihilated, but there subsists the face of your Lord”):

Your face in the mirror: two faces
 Don’t lie – God

²⁵⁶ Barrett, *op.cit.*, pp. 61-2

²⁵⁷ al-Bayyātī, *Diwān*, p. 133

²⁵⁸ al-Bayyātī, *al-Kitāba*, p. 67

Sees you in the mirror.²⁵⁹

This denudation of the modern experience, this revelation of the contingency of life, is precisely what the Sufi attempts to overcome through the process of *fanā'*: rejection of man's exoteric non-existence, or illusory existence, in order to reach genuine existence (*baqā'*). The mystical path is the means to transcend the existential state of exile. From this perspective, Sufism is an atheistic enterprise: Heideggerian man's existence in Being is comparable to the Sufi's existence in God:

individuals have no self other than what they are with God, and all of what they are belongs to God, not to them. Our true and proper self is no self at all, that is, no self of our own.²⁶⁰

The old conflict between faith and reason was the motive behind much existentialist philosophy. While not negating reason, Sufism sees truth as beyond its scope, something with which Heidegger appeared to agree: "Reason, glorified for centuries, is the most obstinate adversary of thinking".²⁶¹ Sufism's indifference towards reason is clearly echoed in the existentialist tradition:

Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche point up a profound dissociation, or split, that has taken place in the being of Western man, which is basically the conflict of reason with the whole man. According to Kierkegaard, reason threatens to swallow up faith; Western man now stands at a crossroads forced to choose either to be religious or to fall into despair. Having chosen the former, he must, being rooted historically in Christianity, enact a radical renewal of the Christian faith. For Nietzsche the era of reason and science raises a question of what is to be done with the primitive instincts and passions of man; in pushing these latter aside the age threatens us with a decline in vitality for the whole species. What lies behind both prophetic messages is the perception that man is estranged from his own being.²⁶²

Such is al-Bayyātī's predicament: his "neo-Sufism" is essentially a psychological counterpoint to Kierkegaard's 'renewal of the Christian faith'. Like the existentialists, he lives in a time when man has become severed from God and must find his way back. The Sufi conception of God and Heideggerian conception of Being differ in little more than a linguistic and cultural sense:

²⁵⁹ al-Bayyātī, *Bustān*, p. 59

²⁶⁰ Chittick, *Sufism*, p. 46

²⁶¹ Heidegger, quoted in Barrett, *op.cit.*, p. 206

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 207

Heidegger's philosophy is neither atheism or theism, but a description of the world from which God is absent. It is now the night of the world, Heidegger says, quoting the poet Hölderlin; the god has withdrawn himself, as the sun sets below the horizon. And meanwhile the thinker can only redeem the time by seeking to understand what is at once nearest and farthest from man: his own being and Being itself.²⁶³

Heidegger's concept of "the One", denoting the impersonal or public being which every man is supposed to be prior to himself, recalls al-Bayyātī's attempts to integrate the individual and the collective in a mystical revolution. Heidegger's anti-anthropocentrism, consistent with the Sufi view that God/Being, rather than man, is the axis of existence, also informs al-Bayyātī's acute sense of exile. While man's position outside the city precludes him from cosmic centrality, to enter the city – through mystical union with God, thus achieving a unity of humanity and divinity – would restore him to such a status.

Existentialism and Sufism, therefore, are but different faces of man's continuous search for truth, and al-Bayyātī's existentialist concerns lead directly into his experiments with Sufism. In this regard, his mid-late 1960s volumes – *The Book of Poverty and Revolution* (1965), *That which comes and does not come* (1966), and *Death in Life* (1968) – reflect the apotheosis of his existential musings interwoven with an increasing use of mysticism, both in terms of concepts and characters. Moreover, it was the existentialists Nietzsche and Heidegger who paved the way for later 20th century postmodern thought, and after this point al-Bayyātī's work begins to display distinctly postmodern characteristics that are also highly compatible with Sufi ideas. For example, the notion of perpetual incompleteness – the focal theme of al-Bayyātī's poetry – evokes the Sufi recognition of the impossibility of full and permanent identification with God:

Which of us is blind
 In the prison of freedom,
 Crying beneath the stony walls
 And dying in sheer isolation,
 Condemned by the rules of the game?²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Ibid, p. 208

²⁶⁴ al-Bayyātī, *Bustān*, p. 34

Al-Bayyātī's Anti-Sufi Inclinations

However, al-Bayyātī's use of mysticism is by no means a straightforward affair. His autobiographical *My Poetic Experience* (1968) reveals a lingering distaste for the intuitive approach, as opposed to the grounded rationalism that he still maintains will provide salvation:

... the objective understanding of opposites that prevails over the law of life, and the understanding and discovery of the logic of history and its interaction with current events, give the poet the complete vision and power to transcend towards the future. Since the future is not born in a vacuum, the poet can achieve this transcendence only if he is able to live with and comprehend the present... I therefore disdain the many false poetic experiences that are laden with Sufi hallucination and allegedly intuitive perception, as they are mostly based on an idealist vision that is against rationality, science and reality, that despises the present and eliminates it from its vision of social classes.²⁶⁵

Still clearly in ideological mode, al-Bayyātī is restating his firm conception of the poet, not as a romantic escapist oblivious to human suffering, but as a committed revolutionary who is 'drowning up to his ears in the chaos and turmoil of world'²⁶⁶ The implication is that Sufism is an abdication of responsibility, an obstacle to commitment. Al-Bayyātī's al-Ḥallāj is undoubtedly as much a revolutionary as a mystic, but at this point, perhaps wishing to maintain his committed reputation, he appears to disregard the correlation between the two roles. It is only later, when his revolutionary ideas have evolved towards a more personal perspective, slipping from the modern belief in rational truth into the irrational postmodern flux, that he can fully appreciate the contribution of Sufis such as ʿAṭṭār and Ḥāfiz:

You were born in the gardens of the gods
 And died in Shiraz
 All your lovers in the houses of the dead
 And in the tombs of ashes
 Were illuminated by passion, and awoke in tears
 When you opened for them a crack in the wall.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī*, p. 38

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 42

²⁶⁷ al-Bayyātī, *Bukā'iyya*, p. 9

Analysis of Individual Poems

In order to demonstrate the validity of the arguments above, and to further illustrate the developing role of Sufism in al-Bayyātī's work and its thematic interrelation to his other concerns as a poet, the following section of this chapter will examine in chronological order a number of his poems written during the period 1964-98.

The Torment of al-Ḥallāj (1964)

This poem was contemporaneous with Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's verse play *The Tragedy of al-Ḥallāj*, and three years subsequent to Adonis' *Elegy to al-Ḥallāj*: all three poets used al-Ḥallāj within this short period. The title of al-Bayyātī's volume, *The Book of Poverty and Revolution*, hints strongly at his conception of al-Ḥallāj as the revolutionary champion of the poor who strives for justice and equality, in accordance with his own self-image. However, some critics have questioned the efficacy of al-Ḥallāj's persona in this poem in light of the poet's own comments on the purpose of the mask, arguing that insufficient characterization fails to avoid the pitfalls of subjectivity and imbalance between the voices of the poet and the mask.²⁶⁸ Using al-Ḥallāj as the inspiration for the poem, the argument goes, should not preclude a sufficient degree of semantic clarity and characterization that would contribute to its overall value and message. The poet is accused of letting his own voice dominate that of the persona to the point where the latter is indistinguishable and opaque, and that therefore the intended message suffocates the poem's internal structure and artistic integrity. However, it seems that the motive behind the writing of *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj* was not to create an account of al-Ḥallāj's life: the poem falls somewhere between the narrative and contemplation. In many of his mask poems, al-Bayyātī aims not for full characterization but for a more oblique reflection of the characters' lives. To explore his own experience by speaking *through* the character is the poet's primary objective. Although al-Ḥallāj does not emerge as a distinct, independent character, the opacity and fluidity of his persona appears to be a deliberate artistic choice. It is precisely such qualities that imbue him with greater depth and complexity, and allow him to represent the poet's vision of humanity.

²⁶⁸ Simawe, op.cit., pp. 127-32

Coincidentally or not, the blurring of identities between poet and mask is consistent with the absence of boundaries in the Sufi worldview, while the use of section titles to advance the narrative aspects allows the poet to focus on the psychological predicament of his hero.

It is clear, both from the intertextual nature of al-Bayyātī's poems and from the evidence of his autobiographical writing, that the historical and modern characters and masks used throughout his career are intended to converge into one universal, inspirational character whose various attributes transcend the boundaries of geography and temporality, the 'faceless hero' of existentialism discussed earlier. This reflects the poet's own endless, peripatetic search for truth. As such, his comments on the poetic mask apply not only in this instance but also to many of the poems discussed hereafter:

I tried to present the "exemplary hero" in this age of ours, and in all ages (at the most critical situation of his life), to explore thoroughly these ideal characters' feelings in their most profound existential situations, to express the finite and infinite, the social and cosmic ordeal that they faced, and the progression or transcendence of what they are into what they will be. These [mask] poems therefore acquired this extra dimension of being reborn in every new era.²⁶⁹

Thus al-Bayyātī's hero stands on the *barzakh* uniting the temporal and the eternal, becoming coterminous with the Sufi search for the perfect man, *al-insān al-kāmil*. Indeed, al-Bayyātī's reference to *mawqifuhu al-nihā'i* – the extreme or ultimate situation – implies the Sufi's unification with the Divine Essence. All the different paths lead finally to the same goal, and cannot be absolutely differentiated: the real poet is by his very nature a revolutionary and a man of truth, and therefore a lover of God. This is summed up in al-Bayyātī's definitive statement:

The death and martyrdom of lovers [*'ushshāq*] and revolutionaries and artists remains the bridge that human civilization must cross in order to achieve a more perfect selfhood.²⁷⁰

Thus it appears that by the mid-1960s the secular al-Bayyātī was increasingly aware that his beliefs and aspirations – the very fabric of his being – were compatible with Sufi expression. This 'perfect selfhood' fused his existentialist position with a strong sense of revolutionary mysticism:

²⁶⁹ al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī*, p. 41

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 45

The idea of the poem... is that of the eternal struggle between the artist – and his prodigious powers of creativity – and the oppressive temporal authorities – and its tyrannical, cunning and deceitful ways. This struggle ends with the tragic death of the artist, but his death, here, does not mean that his role in the course of history is over. Rather, death means real birth in the course of history.²⁷¹

A change in the structure and style of his poetic creativity belied a continuity in its underlying motivation. However, what al-Ḥallāj undergoes is no longer merely death, reflecting the finality of the existentialist, but rebirth, reflecting the immortality of the mystic:

For the oil in the lamp will not run dry, and the appointment will not be missed
The wound will not heal, and the seed will not die.²⁷²

The mystic lives, dies and is reborn in the course of the poem, reflecting the mystical transcendence of worldly limitations. The seed clearly symbolizes new birth, while its fulfilment, the tree, represents the cyclical pattern of existence and humanity's reawakening and redemption:

The spirit of the unknown lover and beloved... has been dissolved into the universal spirit of the world. The drops of blood of the crucified al-Ḥallāj have turned into oil in the lamp of humanity, and into a seed, then a tree, then a forest.²⁷³

The poem contains several references to al-Ḥallāj's enlightenment and ultimate transcendence, such as the lamp oil. The lamp will never run out of oil: the spirit of al-Ḥallāj will return in all ages and places. Albeit suffused with anger and sorrow at man's tyranny towards himself, whereby the bringer of salvation is crucified, the poem remains optimistic and determined that this salvation will come. Al-Bayyātī is aware that al-Ḥallāj's immolation only brings him closer to his goal of mystic union, and that the contemptuous throwing of his ashes into the river – one of his favourite symbols for paradise – ironically only further reunites him with his Essence. The physical destruction of his body, the container of his spirit, is no matter, since truth lies beyond

²⁷¹ Ibid, p. 42

²⁷² al-Bayyātī, *Sifr*, p. 30

²⁷³ al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī*, p. 45

the material world. Its burning and scattering represents al-Ḥallāj's final abstraction and ascent towards the Source.

This brings us to al-Bayyātī's principal motive for the use of al-Ḥallāj as a historical archetype. The rebel mystic is highly attractive to the self-professed poet/revolutionary because he severely undermines the foundations of society. In this poem, al-Ḥallāj mystically achieves the ultimate victory, setting an example for those in hardship and fear under repressive regime. At the same time, his transcendence of human suffering and death reveals his universal human relevance. The final seed and lamp images provide a telling counterpoint to the first line of the poem, in which al-Ḥallāj admonishes the poet as a Sufī novice: "You have fallen into the darkness and the void."

The poem's trajectory, therefore, is from pessimism to optimism, from darkness to light, from the void of Heidegger's *Verfallenheit* to paradise regained. Part 1 sees the Sufi seeker at the beginning of his redemptive journey, with al-Ḥallāj giving him counsel and comfort in his malaise. Al-Bayyātī depicts himself here as the modern-day seeker after truth, who has lost faith in the world and is returning to God for salvation. In this sense, he represents the 20th century Arab intellectual suffering from 'vertigo' as he stands at the crossroads of religion and modernity, stripped of freedom by his political circumstances and of security by his human condition. He seems to turn as a last resort to al-Ḥallāj, who represents the solution to both the political and the existential problems at the same time, teaching his pupil to penetrate the inner meaning of existence, where he will find God and salvation.

It is a constitutive part of al-Bayyātī's engaged poetic project to merge the worldwide struggles against injustice from earliest history into the distant future – giving birth in the process to the timeless exemplary hero. The poet makes a dual reference to the prophets of Islam – 'your silence: a spider's web' – and Christianity – 'your crown: a cactus' – commencing an analogy with Christ that continues throughout the poem. The parallel between al-Ḥallāj and Christ adds a certain universality to the poem, crossing the boundaries of religion and culture. Casting the poet-revolutionary in the role of prophet harks back to the ancient unity between the two, as well as the Sufī state of *baqā'*, in which the mystic re-assumes a committed social role. Al-Ḥallāj's story is thereby linked to the death of revolutionaries and martyrs both trans-temporally and trans-geographically, imbuing it with cosmic significance.

Part 2 reflects al-Bayyātī/al-Ḥallāj's lament for his human environment, where 'the hungry workers' bread' has been eaten by 'packs of wolves'. The dominant themes here are darkness, hunger and loneliness. Al-Ḥallāj calls upon God to 'reach out your hand across the years of death and siege' and 'tear up this darkness'. The seashells function as a metaphor for the search for truth, the 'kernel of the kernel', which might relieve the gloom and sorrow:

And here am I, overturning seashells
That might be rose petals, carried on the wind over a corpse,
That might be ghosts.²⁷⁴

Part 3 allegorises those who engage with corrupt temporal power, leading ultimately to betrayal and disillusionment, represented by the death of the sultan's daughter. This prompts a shift towards the esoteric qualities of madness and silence. In his torment the jester seeks out al-Ḥallāj for relief, but the latter, like Sheikh ʿAlī al-Junaydī in Maḥfūz's *al-Liṣṣ wa-l-Kilāb*, only speaks to him in enigmatic hints, for the path to deliverance is long and difficult.

In part 4 al-Bayyātī /al-Ḥallāj is released from his disturbing confrontation with the authorities into a dream in which he is finally unified with his Essence: 'you are I / my wretchedness / my lonesomeness'. However, as al-Bayyātī cannot forget his commitment, so the dream_state is only temporary, and al-Ḥallāj wakes to find that his 'poor brothers', on whose behalf he has endeavoured, are weeping 'in the ruins of the city', leaving him surrounded by the sultan's sycophants, eager for his demise. At this dramatic moment he feels utterly abandoned, even by God, and the only refuges left to him are sleep and, ultimately, death, the 'dawn of salvation', which he seems to welcome as an escape from the emptiness and insecurity of life.

The climactic fifth part again emphasizes the intimate connection between al-Ḥallāj and the wretched of the earth: the poor, the lepers, the blind and the slaves. In contrast to the sultan, al-Ḥallāj is the true king of all humanity, but no sooner has he been metaphorically crowned than he is desecrated by his enemies. This occasions a Christ-esque moment of doubt in al-Ḥallāj, a connection made explicit through the image of his 'last supper'. In a sudden moment of panic, he

²⁷⁴ al-Bayyātī, *Sifr*, p. 16

wonders whether he really will overcome his physical death, and appeals desperately to his Creator to rescue him from the barrenness and waste.

In part 6 – the aftermath of al-Ḥallāj’s crucifixion and dismemberment – his spirit remains alive despite (perhaps more so because of) the desecration of his body. His doubts are allayed, and his death becomes a victory, the final emancipation:

For I am free now, without rags
Free as this fire and this wind, free for ever.²⁷⁵

Liberation from life’s cruelty at the cost of death – this is al-Ḥallāj’s message, according to al-Bayyātī, and it is one of hope rather than nihilism. For this poet, death is the only passage to new life: the ashes of al-Ḥallāj’s body will nourish the forest of the new generation of humanity. The hero functions as a mythological fertility or rebirth symbol, like the Phoenix, expressing the need for regeneration and a new dawn in Arab life.

This poem makes telling use of the mask technique to reflect al-Bayyātī’s ongoing insights into his exile and existence. Its structure mirrors the poet’s own experience as he finds his new inward direction, signalling a more subtle interpretation of revolution that fuses the personal and the political. The poet undergoes a new birth, from the repentance of part 1 to being ‘born in adulthood’ in part 3 and ‘unified’ in part 4. Ultimately, however, the political oppressors remain dominant and his only path to deliverance is to sacrifice his life, as al-Bayyātī notes elsewhere:

Death has become the price for freedom and freedom the price for death.²⁷⁶

Therefore, while portraying what he considers a model revolutionary and a symbol of eternal resistance to tyranny, the poet emphasizes, through the voluntary death of the protagonist, the disturbing relation between freedom and mortality. For the despairing, alienated al-Bayyātī, as for Sufis, death will increasingly acquire a new and more optimistic connotation.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 29

²⁷⁶ al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī*, p. 27

Elegy to the Unborn City (1970)

This poem is a succinct example of al-Bayyātī's revolutionary impulse viewed through a primordial and mystical lens. Its 19 lines contain references to nearly all the constituents of the *mandala* diagram, the most significant of which is the theme of exile from the virtuous city. Al-Bayyātī acknowledges that this city is 'unborn', i.e. it will never exist, although he cannot give up the search. He describes how his father – a god-like figure – teaches him to intuitively understand earthly but ephemeral phenomena: rivers, fire, clouds and mirages. The unborn city itself is a mirage, and therefore inevitably condemns the poet to perpetual 'departure' and 'sadness'. His 'walking around the homes of God's friends' conjures the notions of the Sufis' proximity to truth and the absurdity of the *ṭawāf*, the circular ritual that aims to overcome man's exile from God. This is the infinite and absurd quest for absolute truth, which for al-Bayyātī takes the form of the perfect city. Although he continues this search for 'on the map of the world', he admits that it is 'hidden and enchanted' and therefore unattainable. If exile on earth is his living fate, it seems the alternative is death or its equivalent.

The object of his search is described in mystical images – the homes of God's friends – and in terms of 'light,' 'warmth' and 'inner earth', thus demonstrating the interchangeable nature of these motifs in his psyche (see diagram). The 'seer's prophecy' is another example of the super_rational insights associated with mysticism, as the subsistent Sufi attains the visionary powers of prophethood. Al-Bayyātī fuses all these ideas to sum up the absurdity of an endless quest for something that cannot be found. This, however, is precisely the undertaking of the Sufi.

Eye of the Sun, or the Transformations of Muhy al-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī in *The Interpreter of Desires* (1971)

In this poem, a passionate eight-part expression of his deep existential angst, al-Bayyātī assumes the mask of the great Sufi master ibn al-ʿArabī, the 'seal of God's friends'.²⁷⁷ ʿAin Shams, the eye of the sun, is his beloved, and therefore by extension symbolises the divine Source of existence. This is unmistakably the midpoint of the *mandala*, the zero-dimension epicentre of

²⁷⁷ Baldick, op.cit, p. 83

cosmic energy towards which the mystical path offers a return. For the Sufis, human love is but a part of the all-encompassing divine love: the symbol of *°Ain Shams* works on both levels, allowing al-Bayyātī to express his simultaneous search for love and truth.

Here, as in *The Torment of al-Hallāj*, the devastation of man's exile does not prevent al-Bayyātī from ending on a note of desperate optimism, whereby the virtuous city's walls disintegrate:

The shadow and the mask will fall from my face and yours
And the walls will crumble.²⁷⁸

The poet insists that the darkness of the shadow/mask will give way to the light of truth, i.e. man comes face to face with God. However, this elusive unveiling – and psychological salvation – seems more hope than expectation. In part 1 he describes his experience of cosmic unity, implying ibn al-°Arabī's doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd*, although here and in part 3 he also appears to refer to the mutual exclusivity of human life and perfection.

Part 2 makes reference to the Sufi doctrine that God revealed man as a manifestation of Himself, while going on to suggest that man's worldly existence is a continuous death. This exile in the world is man's blindness from the true light, and al-Bayyātī's ibn al-°Arabī is then led into this exile by his beloved, °Ain Shams.

Part 4 expresses ibn al-°Arabī's union with God and return to the world through the metaphor of °Ain Shams. Significantly, this union – 'we possessed each other' – occurs 'under the Eastern sky', i.e. in the direction of Sufi truth. But °Ain Shams returns to Damascus, ibn al-°Arabī's resting place, leaving him a 'slave in exile', physically alive but spiritually dead, which clearly allegorises al-Bayyātī's own predicament.

Damascus, this poem's virtuous city symbol, is simultaneously near and far, reflecting the absent presence both of al-Bayyātī's ideals of love and revolution and of the Sufi god: in the Qur'ān (50:16) God is nearer to man than his jugular vein, yet simultaneously distant and intangible.

²⁷⁸ al-Bayyātī, *Qaṣā'id Ḥubb*, p. 24

There is a sharp contrast between ibn al-^cArabī's unitive experience and the modern torment experienced by the poet:

Are separation and death our destiny?
 In this land without water, grass or fire
 Is all we have the flesh of horses and women
 And the corpses of ideas?²⁷⁹

The natural and elemental images – water, grass and fire – refer to the inner vitality and truth in which the dying Arab wasteland is so lacking. Such symbols of purity stand in diametric opposition to the notion of flesh, symbolizing moral and physical decay, and the ‘corpses of ideas’ that characterise the modern Arab reality. Nothing remains for the poet but transformation of the self through love, but even this, he points out in Part 7, is seen as a heinous crime: the oppressive order condemns poets as subversive madmen.

In the final part, death is portrayed once again as the key to the virtuous city: through his death the Sufi master returns to Damascus, where al-Bayyātī eventually found his own resting place. He still wonders, however, how to overcome the living death of Arab reality:

Who will stop the bleeding?
 All that we love departs or dies...²⁸⁰

This image of bleeding – a potent, recurring symbol of death and departure – is the prelude to al-Bayyātī's trademark defiance in the final lines, in which the cycle of life and death is continued through the vision of a ‘new birth’.

The opaque relationship between the poem's subject and the corresponding historical character is perhaps even more marked here than in *The Torment of al-Ḥallāj*: by the 1970s, the poet has moved well away from realistic portrayals. Perhaps inevitably, there is more of al-Bayyātī here than of ibn al-^cArabī, whose presence in the poem entails something of an absence. However, the

²⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 20

²⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 23-4

character works as an expression of the poet's own existential turmoil, which he skilfully weaves between the layers of ibn al-ʿArabī's own mystical preoccupations.

Letters to the Imām al-Shāfiʿī (1971)

In this more pessimistic poem al-Bayyātī further articulates the theme of death for the sake of salvation, and continues to explore his exilic state. This poem, perhaps more than the earlier ones, defines his ideas on the cyclical, irrational nature of life and death, being and nothingness. Acknowledging the inevitability of lifelong exile, he conceives of his death and resurrection as a process through which he will finally transform his fleeting visions of the perfect city into a reality. In part 1 he is taken by his guide, the *sheikh* to his *murīd*, to the gates of the 'cities of innovation', on whose walls he is eventually crucified, like al-Ḥallāj, at the end of the poem. The poet's trauma is captured in images such as the nakedness of the lonely road of misery. Nakedness is an ambiguous theme: the denudation of the modern experience is at once the psychological abstraction and return to nature. Unveiling the mask of culture will restore man to his pure selfhood, as with the Sufi *insān kāmil*, but the poet cannot remove the mask: he stands at the gates of the city, unable to enter. 'Do not reveal the secret,' says the guide, recalling the untellable Sufi secret, before leaving the poet/lover floundering 'in his loneliness, calling on the power of things.'

In contrast to his alienation, in part 3 al-Bayyātī appears to proclaim a profound, almost mystical love for Being: 'my heart is infatuated with all things.' These things include 'death' and 'the miracles of dawn', which again suggests the rebirth archetype. Existence ideally entails a perpetual new dawn, always beginning afresh. As is also clear from a later poem, this rebirth is his permanent objective:

We swore together: by the man the sun, by the lyre the woman
Has the miracle of life after death taken place?²⁸¹

In part 5, the city reappears in his vision of a green oasis in the desert, which inevitably turns out to be a mirage. The non-existent oasis leaves the poet in crisis, enveloped in darkness, waiting for

²⁸¹ al-Bayyātī, *Sīra Dhātīyya*, p. 81

death so that he can reach the real oasis. His exilic predicament remains unchanged: he cannot enter the banquet (parts 5/6), but must await his fate at the 'gates of [Shiraz's] impossible'. In part 7, the same predicament is articulated in terms of the two separated halves of the sun, analogous to the lover and the Beloved. These two halves cannot be reconciled: the lover cannot return to his Beloved and al-Bayyātī is forever denied his goal of a 'more perfect selfhood'.

Part 8 sees the poet, in his desperation, returning to religious rituals and the image of childhood, and once more invoking 'the power of things.' His psychological needs here, it seems, can be fulfilled through dissolving into the essence of humanity, the most potent image of which is, for him, 'the poor of the earth' (line 4). The 'meadow in Shiraz', this poem's image of Paradise, is bathed in light, and its gates are opened by the butterfly, a symbol of beauty and ephemerality. This butterfly is none other than °Ā'isha, who disappears into the meadow, leaving him 'waiting at the last gate', as his guide had foretold. Thus al-Bayyātī is denied in his search for transcendental love as for immortal Being. Like the truth, °Ā'isha is always ultimately concealed.

The conclusion follows that the 'source', the secret of perfect selfhood, cannot be found in this world. As the Sufis attest, this source cannot be reified, nor therefore found. Like °Ā'isha, the symbol for love, it is an ethereal, esoteric entity, simultaneously present and absent. Even here, however, al-Bayyātī shows his strong sense of hope: the guide's tears are another symbol of rebirth, of 'silent nature', only to be shattered by his own death in the final line.

Death and the Lamp (1975)

This poem signals al-Bayyātī's continuing departure from the outer realms of social and political critique to focus on his inner psychological turmoil. The 'inner intellect' is literally synonymous in Arabic with the esoteric: *al-bāṭin*, which the poet describes here in terms of the following interrelated concepts: 'pagan lands of music, black magic, sex, revolution, death.' These pagan lands are also the realm of God, as he points out at the end of part 1. Another prominent motif here is fire, which is similar to nakedness in its ambiguity. It often symbolizes spiritual devastation, as in part 6; at other times it evokes the burning passion of the lover for his Beloved.

In part 7 al-Bayyātī confronts the exile of language: words are his only possible refuge, but they are also exiled by their very nature. Thus language and poetry are empty homes that provide no shelter from the threat of nothingness. Al-Bayyātī dreams of creating a new language to replace the old, dead one. Both he and language need rebirth, as is indicated in part 8:

My being took shape
And that shape became reality in the virgin language.²⁸²

This expresses his desire for rebirth into a transcendental language that will speak the truth and end his exile. In part 9, then, his language becomes ‘a lamp at God’s door’. Then finally the poet commits suicide ‘before the pole star set’, perhaps so that he can still reach God. This suicide seems to be a mystical journey from the non-existence of life to the real existence behind it. In this esoteric reality, as the Sufis attest, materiality no longer holds any value: he cathartically casts his possessions away, leaving only his voice at God’s door, the gate to immortality.

The Light from Granada (1979)

By the late 1970s, al-Bayyātī’s poems have become haunting streams of consciousness, or, more accurately, streams of unconscious, for pieces such as this one are Nietzschean, dream-like effusions that speak of the loss of identity and the search for God in a godless world. This is one of al-Bayyātī’s deepest and most complex poems, in which the defiant optimism of earlier poems is absent. He seems to have internalised the notion of climbing a path towards esoteric truth, approached via the themes of love, death, birth, language and music. At the end of this disturbing dream-sequence only his permanent exile prevails, leaving him utterly bereft. Again, the idea that death is the cost for the return to lost innocence is prominent: the poet describes a rebirth in the Arabian desert, returning as ‘an orphan to the cave of Ḥīra.’ This reference to the prophet Muḥammad sees him in his role as the original Sufi, who transcends ‘the human condition, circling around God and His earthly abodes.’ Here the ancient ritual of *ṭawāf* reappears to reveal its original meaning: to restore man from his exoteric ego to his esoteric self.

²⁸² al-Bayyātī, *Ḥubb wa Mawt*, p. 180

In part 1 al-Bayyātī ascends an internal path in order to overcome the human condition. At the climax he sees a ‘blind musician’, a recurring theme implying that physical blindness belies esoteric vision, *istibtān*. As with the Sufi and God, their identities fuse at the climax: the poet/musician raises his hand ‘in the silence of the void of things, searching for what he has lost, circling alone around God’. Here is the clearest acknowledgement of his loss: loss of complete selfhood at birth, the original pre-fall perfection that the mystic attempts to recapture by performing the *ṭawāf* around his heart/inner God. The climax of the path puts him ‘beneath the sky of a different land’, i.e. transcending his humanity, but al-Bayyātī cannot stay there: ‘the strings still chase me in the silence of the hall.’ His climactic identification with the musician subsides to resume the harrowing experience of exile, his default state. He confronts the paradox of rebirth: the door to immortal life is a re-entry into the human condition; the irrational circularity of the one ‘who must leave or stay, who begins or ends his journey’ (part 2) is utterly bewildering. To find ‘the land of becoming’, the poet must as ever overcome the Sphinx, the guard of his perfect city, ‘who rejects the unknown void with a smile’. In defeat he is left with ‘this fire’ (part 3), his unflinching desire, and the ‘agony of poets’, whose fate it is to seek what they will never find.

The journey continues in part 4: al-Bayyātī’s ‘manchild’ – recalling the child archetype and Sufi *tawakkul* – is unified in love and again loses or transcends his identity. But he is possessed by ‘these two opposites’: trapped in the irreconcilable polarity of exoteric and esoteric. This is an unanswerable question, suggesting that exile is permanent: ‘He who has no house now will never build one.’ The climax comes once more, and al-Bayyātī dissolves in his love, leaving the woman weeping ‘in her eternal exile’ (part 5) and the vision of Granada, the perfect city, unfulfilled.

Selections from the Torments of Farīd al-Dīn al-^oAttār (1979)

Taken from the same volume, *The Kingdom of Grain*, this poem is a similarly complex melange of concepts couched in more explicitly Sufi terms, specifically the wine and tavern metaphors. Here al-Bayyātī wears the mask of the famous Persian poet ^oAttār, author of the long poem *Mantiq al-Ṭayr*, who searches for his Beloved. Again, identities fuse and the seeker sees his true self in the Sought, recalling the words of the famous Sufi Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī:

You were my mirror; I have become the mirror. I see my nakedness as I render you naked before me; I search for you in my drunkenness and my sobriety as long as the cupbearer's goblets speak without tongues.²⁸³

The images of mystical union in Part I later give way to al-Bayyātī's defiant vision of a future time of esoteric enlightenment when 'man becomes mist for his brother' and 'Ā'isha will rise', i.e. unity/love/truth will be achieved. True to form, no sooner has this vision of 'Ā'isha arisen than it is dashed: and the poets' lanterns are thrown 'into the depths of wells', thus continuing the reign of darkness over the light.

In claiming that 'Only the taverner is victorious', al-Bayyātī adapts the Islamic maxim '*Lā ghāliba illā Allāh*', suggesting man's insignificance and powerlessness in relation to God. The sense is ambiguous, since wine is the classic Sufi metaphor for mystical intoxication. In parts 6 and 7 the poet, in a Khayyām-esque spirit of hedonistic abandon, accepts the finitude of life, before he is returned to the 'belly (*baṭn*) of the earth' to begin the cycle of Being again. Yet still he cannot fully come to terms with the inevitability of death, and in part 8 entreats the taverner – God – to save him from this fate. Here al-Bayyātī seems torn between the existentialist view of human finitude and the Sufi transcendence of the human condition, whereby he can 'become the mirror'. Ultimately, however, only the taverner remains, as testified in the Qur'ānic verse (55:26-7): "Everything on earth is annihilated, but there subsists the face of your Lord".

From 'Ā'isha's Papers (1989)

In this volume, '*Ā'isha's Orchard*', written a full decade later, al-Bayyātī's unattainable virtuous city appears as its psychological equivalent: the orchard, realm of love. While the style and structure of the poems has changed – shorter and more succinct than the rambling, hallucinatory visions of earlier – the underlying theme continues. By now, the search for love seems to be the poet's main preoccupation, to the exclusion of his well-known socio-political concerns: hence the *mandala* appears as orchard rather than city. Love has become the Absolute, although for al-Bayyātī, revolution and love are ultimately one. Here he describes how 'Ā'isha builds 'a temple

²⁸³ Ibid, p. 248

to love', thus giving it religious status. As he suggests elsewhere, his 'religion of love', the theme that dominates the remainder of his career, is but a variant of the neo-Sufi paradigm:

Borges is blind
 But he is better than me
 For he reads sacred books
 And he is not as sad as me
 Because he knows every religion
 And I know only the religion of love.²⁸⁴

Therefore this temple – a *barzakh* symbol mediating world and earth – is the place of worship for his 'religion of love'. Building a temple to worship divine Love is a continuation of al-Bayyātī's mystical theme of sublimating the finite into the infinite. It connects man to God/earth; this internal semantic circularity is symbolised by °Ā'isha's ring.

If love is the fusion of lover and Beloved into one, °Ā'isha is al-Bayyātī's goddess of love, and she therefore takes on divine attributes. In the same volume, the poet says of her:

She transmigrated into every face
 And wandered – sleeping in my blood
 A saint fleeing in the darkness.²⁸⁵

Just as al-Bayyātī's al-Ḥallāj fulfils the archetype of the perfect man, his °Ā'isha represents that of love. All female figures in his poems are variations of her: she remains omnipresent (and omniabsent) in his work, especially later on. All these different forms of °Ā'isha possess the same essential spirit; all are masks hiding the true face of a divine Love. In this sense, the mask corresponds to the city walls: the barrier between external appearance and inner truth. Therefore, as his poems illustrate, al-Bayyātī can never fully know °Ā'isha.

²⁸⁴ al-Bayyātī, *Nuṣūṣ*, p. 78

²⁸⁵ al-Bayyātī, *Bustān*, p. 52

Birth in the Unborn Cities (1989)

In this concise expression of the paradox of his existence, the poet adapts the same Islamic maxim to his 'religion of love': 'Only love is victorious.' The search for love is psychologically analogous to the search for truth: the 'lost Real' is the object of both. al-Bayyātī's exile can be overcome through the security of love, through entering 'Ā'isha's orchard. Being 'born in unborn cities' neatly expresses his total exile, his state of existential absence. He will only truly exist in the perfect city, but he lives and dies in unborn cities, non-Reality. His poetry becomes a sacrifice to the religion of love; words and form dissolve in the search for something beyond physicality. The parallel between the poet's morbid state and that of modern Arab civilization is implied here: his own spiritual death derives directly from that of the entire nation.

The Martyr (1989)

Here al-Bayyātī articulates his philosophy of death and resurrection through the unknown martyr, drawing on inspiration from al-Hallāj, to Ernesto Guevara, to the Palestinian *fidā'ī*. This philosophy fuses the revolutionary experience – 'transcendence through death' – with the religious one. al-Bayyātī's martyr is a Nietzschean god-man who achieves mystical perfection by laying down his life for others. He attains immortality through his heroic, revolutionary death, surpassing the finitude of 'the peoples of the Earth'. This is a recapitulation of his previously expressed neo-mystical idea that lovers [*ushshāq*], revolutionaries and artists die to create a bridge towards a more perfect selfhood for human civilization. By becoming 'united in the essence of God' in death, the mortal martyr achieves immortality. Death for al-Bayyātī, in his desperate optimism, means 'real birth in the course of history', since it

is not conquered by renewal; it conquers temporally-limited life, but it does not conquer renewal. It extends it by means of continuation [*baqā'*], so long as that renewal is perfection and renewal along a straighter path. This means: revolution and death for the sake of revolution are in reality nothing other than a positive extension of the achievement of renewal.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī*, p. 44

To Jorge Luis Borges (1989)

By this volume al-Bayyātī's greater poetic maturity allows him to communicate meditations on Being and non-Being with greater succinctness and clarity, giving these poems a new directness and power. This homage to the blind Borges is one his most definitive poems: candid, concise and unencumbered by the potentially awkward use of poetic masks. It credits him with visionary, esoteric powers: he can see 'behind the door... behind the mask of myth', i.e. the archetypal truth denied to exoteric vision. Borges may have no outer eye, but his inner eye (the 'ain individuation symbolism again) penetrates the mask that veils the truth. In this sense, the great Argentinian writer is equivalent to the one who 'trusts in God' and who sees 'my other face beneath the mask of death... in the kingdom of exile.' This other face, the Eastern face referred to above, is the esoteric truth hidden behind the ruinous exoteric mask of death that the poet must wear so long as he lives. Life is death, and death therefore becomes life. Since the inner eye possesses real vision, the poet reflects: 'which of us is blind / in the prison of freedom?' In keeping with the logical inversions, 'prison' is not the realm of enclosure, but that of unending open-ness, where he is cast off 'in sheer isolation', unable to restore his split selfhood to perfection.

Birth (1989)

In this lament for two of his poetic heroes, Neruda and Hikmet, the internal unity of al-Bayyātī's themes is once again clear: 'innovation, love and death are all birth', i.e. psychological fulfilment. However, he must simultaneously acknowledge the irrationality and irony of his philosophy: this rebirth is ultimately a matter of faith, concealed from the poet himself.

°Ā'isha's Orchard (1989)

Here al-Bayyātī reaches the crux of the volume: °Ā'isha's orchard is none other than the 'enchanted' city from which he is exiled. The 'northern Arabs' search in vain for entry, turning to sacrificial ritual in their desperation. The poet alludes to the failure of Communism in opening the gates – 'the morning star faded' – but what is the alternative? It might be via the river Khābūr, perhaps indicating a mystical means of entry, but ultimately only death is the door. Death is simultaneously man's salvation and his end: this is the cruel paradox. The last five lines

suggest that the magic circle of Being is but an illusion in man's mind. Al-Bayyātī has descended into the endless, cyclical madness of the postmodern, from which there is no escape: human existence, it seems, is predicated on a void that consumes the poet from within.

Sacred Revelation (1989)

Still now, al-Ḥallāj, perhaps the most enduring of al-Bayyātī's personae, reappears. There is an unmistakably mystical and archetypal climax to this poem: al-Ḥallāj 'makes love' to the Tigris, uniting his self with the water. This is his *fanā'*, his return to God, dissolving back into the source of his existence in order to be reborn. The true man does not die but is merely part of this endless revolution. As the poet says of °Ā'isha, here al-Ḥallāj 'ultimately dissolve[s] into the constantly revitalized spirit of being.'²⁸⁷

The Face (1989)

This poem is about man's relation to God/Being. Both the Sufi and the postmodern perspective see man as an unreality, a mere reflection. Here the poet affirms man's place in the dualistic constellation of Being: in exile, i.e. the object, not the subject, of divine grammar.

The Secret of Fire (1989)

This poem, above all, defines the 'religion of love' to which al-Bayyātī resorts in the shadow of his mortality. This religion, like all religions, is a means of overcoming death. The exoteric, visible half of °Ā'isha he describes here simply as a woman, perhaps the 'perfect (yet faceless) woman' to complement the 'perfect (yet faceless) man', while the other, esoteric half lies beyond language: 'inexpressible'. He has reached the point where language turns in on itself:

For words
Escape me
And I from them

²⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 45

We both collapse...²⁸⁸

He nevertheless does his best to express this esoteric half in what symbolic language he has left, describing her in those familiarly elemental terms that bring man back to his origin: ‘the fire of the forests’, ‘the water of the river’, ‘the secret of fire’ and, ultimately, ‘a priestess in the temple of ‘Ishtār’. This final, archetypal image revives the themes of the ancient, the natural, the earthly and the mystical, all of which belong inside the circle of Being, while the temple symbolizes the fusion of finite and infinite. Her exoteric half is visible with his outer eye, while the other half, like Borges, he must see with his inner eye. Thus the duality of the exoteric and the esoteric is combined into one unified vision. The relative brevity of such poems reflects the fact that he has come much closer to perfecting his vision of love: all further words are superfluous.

Lament for Hāfīz of Shīrāz (1998)

Hāfīz of Shīrāz (d. 1390) makes a fitting final hero for al-Bayyātī in this poem written less than a year before his death, not only because he had used Shīrāz, ‘city of wisdom and poetry / land of God’s friends’ [i.e. the Sufī ‘saints’] so often as a symbol of the virtuous city, but also because this Persian Sufī poet confronted the very same paradox of existence that so preoccupies him. Hāfīz gained the epithet *lisān al-ghayb*, ‘The Tongue of the Unseen’, due to his visionary powers. We are reminded of al-Bayyātī’s goddess of love, ‘Ā’isha, when Hāfīz says:

O Lord, who is worthy to hear this subtle secret?

She’s witnessed everywhere, but she’s never shown her face.²⁸⁹

Shīrāz is the virtuous city: only those who have taken on divine characteristics may enter it, hence the veneration of this Sufī poet. Al-Bayyātī sees Hāfīz as one of few who have looked over the city walls into the unseen, and indeed who ‘opened a crack in the wall’ for those who wish to do the same. Only the visionary poets may be victorious in the struggle against time and mortality, which explains his description of Hāfīz as having ‘died in Shīrāz’. The ‘cup of immortal wine’ – a clear reference to his Sufism – cures him of the paradoxical human condition:

²⁸⁸ al-Bayyātī, *Bustān*, p. 88

²⁸⁹ Hāfīz, quoted in Chittick, *Sufism*, p. 153

the implication is that al-Bayyātī desires this Sufī deliverance. But ‘evening descends’: the cycle of life and death continues and the poet must confront his imminent departure.

At this late stage in his life, when ‘no wine is left in the jar’, al-Bayyātī seems ready to surrender everything to God, his salvation: ‘let us pawn the rag with my master the taverner’ ... ‘who will buy the sultan’s turban / for a bottle of wine’. ‘Ḥāfīz the poor’ – poor materially, rich spiritually – goes mad and burns into nothingness in his love for God. Al-Bayyātī attests to the sole permanence of God, while all else perishes: ‘The cities whose cheeks I kissed / have turned to ashes.’ Insofar as he is human, he is finite, but insofar as he is a reflection of this God, a part of Being, he is infinite. Besides from leaving behind his poems, this is the only remaining way to transcend death. Like Ḥāfīz, he goes mad with desire for his god, although his religion is now the ‘religion of love’.

This religion is then consummated in a mystical union, or unitive fusion, of lover and Beloved, which transcends the concept of identity. This is the very act of entry into the city. Here al-Bayyātī’s central theme, and the *mandala* used here to interpret it, is once again made explicit: the ‘circle of magic’ is the kingdom of love. In it the body is a poem – the outer manifestation of the inner truth – while the ‘cycle of the seasons’ represents that of earthly existence itself: man, as part of nature, is locked in a perpetual cycle of death and rebirth.

Although al-Bayyātī still dreams of a time when he, like Ḥāfīz, enters the magic circle, he must now reconcile himself to his imminent death: ‘here is autumn / spreading through the gardens of the gods’. However, if this death is merely the prelude to ‘the fires of birth’, the struggle for human perfection will outlast al-Bayyātī’s end, to be taken up always and everywhere by future poets and revolutionaries. This birth, the final word in the poem, is a desperate note of optimism that resonates on many levels: personal (the poet), national (Iraq), civilizational (Arab) and universal (humanity). What seems to be a confession of deep melancholy is therefore ignited by his enduring hope. He seems to recognise that the greatest progression is simultaneously a return to the origin: the circle goes on and on, spinning in infinity.

The Night of Meaning (1999)

Al-Bayyātī's final published poem is a concise recapitulation of his poetic philosophy: only the true poets among men have been able to defeat the Sphinx who guards the virtuous city. Life is ultimately a journey towards death, just as Plato said that to philosophise is to learn to die. Al-Bayyātī has spent his whole life learning how to die, how to enter the city gates. Now that he is standing on the brink, the irrational nature of Being is clearer than ever: he has seen nothing and yet everything at the same time.

Perhaps al-Bayyātī has finally reconciled himself to death in the only way he can, religiously. He implores God, to whom he knows he will shortly be returning, to allow him to defeat the Sphinx with one final magic poem of truly divine words. The night of meaning will, he is convinced, lead to that perennial new dawn of which all his poetry is an expression. If external vision is blind, then perhaps in the Unseen, to which death is the bridge, he, like Borges, Ḥāfiẓ, al-Ḥallāj and his other exemplary heroes, will see all.

Conclusion

Al-Bayyātī's life is a search for the perfect city and the perfect existence; ultimately, for the perfect man. To answer this chapter's opening question, he can indeed be considered as the exponent of a 'revolutionary esoteric' mode in his attempts to maintain a harmony between individual and collective salvation. What he describes as his 'mythical-historical hero', the exemplar of his mystical humanism, is highly reminiscent of the radical Iranian thinker 'Alī Shari'atī's (1933-77) 'theomorphic man', who is 'a blend of Camus' *homme revolte* and Ibn al-'Arabi's 'Perfect Man':

This ideal man passes through the very midst of nature and comes to understand God; he seeks out mankind and thus attains God. He does not bypass nature and turn his back on mankind. He holds the sword of Caesar in his hand and he has the heart of Jesus in his breast. He thinks with the brain of Socrates and loves God with the heart of Hallaj... Ideal man has three aspects: truth, goodness and beauty – in other words, knowledge, ethics and art. He is a theomorphic being exiled on earth: with the combined wealth of love and knowledge, he rules over all beings... He is the great rebel of the world.²⁹⁰

Al-Bayyātī's archetype traces its intellectual genealogy to Sufism, Marxism and existentialist thought. If Truth is divine in Sufism, then human justice and equality, along with the poet's romantic aspirations, achieve the same status for him. This occasions a sense of *participation mystique*, whereby he effectively identifies God with humanity and thereby to some extent reconciles his Communism with his neo-Sufism. This *participation mystique* is 'an unconscious identity': loss of ego-consciousness in the mass is a quasi-mystical union. Al-Bayyātī's humanistic instincts find their first outlet in this Communist ideal, elevating it virtually to divine status. However, since hopes of realizing this ideal in the Arab context are repeatedly dashed, and since even al-Bayyātī begins to sense that the Communist revolution enslaves the individual within an absolutist framework, denying his freedom in both a social and a spiritual sense, he exhibits a gradual but unmistakable shift from collective to individual perfection, from city to orchard as symbol of salvation.

²⁹⁰ 'Alī Shari'atī, quoted in Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, (Penguin, London, 2000), p. 347

Human perfection, the goal of the Sufi, comes about for al-Bayyātī primarily through revolution and love. These are but two guises that manifest the sole unchanging yet ever-changing Existent around which his poems revolve. His al-Ḥallāj is a symbol of the interpretation of this Absolute value precisely in terms of these two values; the result is martyrdom and, perhaps, new life. Ever the revolutionary romantic, al-Bayyātī chooses such a historical character not for his Sufi status, but on account of his radical principles, even if the two coincide in this instance. For him, al-Ḥallāj is an early exponent of Communist values. But his search for the Absolute, for the keys to the city gates, takes him far deeper than any creed or dogma. To capture the essential, pre-cultural elixir of Being, he reverts to mythological and mystical modes that form a bridge to the dawn of humanity. His extensive use of ancient mythology – drawn from the Babylonian, Sumerian, Assyrian and Akkadian traditions of Iraq – derives, like his neo-mystical tendencies, from the attempt to articulate the archetypal origins of mankind towards which his search for human perfection pushes him. Expression of archetypal experiences requires this metaphorical language that is the preserve of mysticism and myth, as Jung notes:

It is... to be expected of the poet that he will resort to mythology in order to give his experience its most fitting expression... The primordial experience is the source of his creativeness; it cannot be fathomed, and therefore requires mythological imagery to give it form. In itself it offers no words or images, for it is a vision seen “as in a glass darkly”. It is merely a deep presentiment that strives to find expression.²⁹¹

However, if this chapter has demonstrated the circular nature of al-Bayyātī’s thought, whereby love, revolution and death all coterminously represent mystical union and therefore can be expressed in analogous terms, then the *mandala* always remains incomplete, in accordance with the postmodern paradigm. Like the Sufi God, it is present but also at the same time mysteriously and irrevocably absent: the ‘unseen’ is unknowable. This paradox fires the poet’s tragic urge to continue an apparently hopeless quest. The pregnant tension between the *mandala*’s logical opposites – exile/home, oppression/revolution, fragmentation/unity, separation/love, mortality/immortality, exoteric/esoteric, and so on – is the source both of his psychological trauma and his artistic creativity, caught as he is in the never-ending search for unity between them, while the ambiguity of Sufi language allows for simultaneous expression of more than one polarity. The poet comes to regard poetry as the creative fusion of these two aspects of reality,

²⁹¹ Jung, *Modern Man*, p. 168

akin to the alchemical fusion of opposites to produce a new and distinct product. In the process, the nature of fundamental issues such as exile, death and meaning is illuminated.

There can be no doubt then that al-Bayyātī's ever-recurring city/orchard motif is psychologically equivalent to the *mandala* symbols of Eastern religions that bear clear philosophical relations to Sufism. In his discussion of the Anthropos, or perfect man, archetype (see Introduction) in the context of a comparative analysis of psychology and religion, Jung notes an instance in which 'the Anthropos himself is the city and his members are the four gates. The Monad is but a spark of light, an atom of the Deity.'²⁹² Al-Bayyātī's city of light is, likewise, the symbol of his psychic disposition, simultaneously incorporating the archetypal *al-insān al-kāmil* of Sufism, the leftist radical's vision of the perfect state, and the psychological refuge from his exilic state.

As Jung points out elsewhere, *mandalas* 'often represent very bold attempts to see and put together apparently irreconcilable opposites and bridge over apparently hopeless splits... The *mandala* affords protection against extreme opposites; that is, the sharpness of the conflict is not yet realised or else is felt as intolerable. The protective circle then guards against possible disruption due to the tension of opposites.'²⁹³ Al-Bayyātī's city/orchard plays precisely this role: it is a protective circle against the vulnerability and insecurity of exile, a symbol of unity in the face of political fragmentation and psychological disintegration. Freedom can be, in the poet's own words, a 'prison', while the *mandala*, conversely, 'shows the divine power before the creation' – before the fall from the paradise of unconsciousness for which the Sufi path offers a remedy – and in it 'the opposites are still [or once more] united. The god rests in the point.' Al-Bayyātī's city, in other words, fulfils the psychological function of the Sufi God.

Since Sufism is the search for the Absolute, al-Bayyātī's own existential experience – his quest for truth and salvation – begins inevitably to mirror the Sufi experience. In the Sufi lexis, therefore, he finds the capacity to express this quest, and Sufism functions as a route into the city to discover the esoteric secret of immortality. Thus a poet who initially rejected everything

²⁹² Jung, *Psychology*, p. 70

²⁹³ Jung, *Archetypes*, pp. 367-90

beyond the scope of “reality” as a dangerous diversion came eventually to seek a reconciliation between this reality and the unattainable infinity that lies beyond it.

Al-Bayyātī’s long physical exile was merely the outer shell of a profound and inescapable existential exile. His mystical tendencies should also be considered in the context of the modern Arab history through which he lived: at the apex of his alienation and despair, when no apparent alternative remains, the poet’s hazardous and tragic journey turns inwards and probes the deepest recesses of the psyche in search for certainty, faith, and love, for some unmovable permanence that might offer a spiritual home and hope of new life. His own acute personal experiences of exile directly contributed towards his conceptualisation and profound investigation of the universal spiritual exile of the modern age. In Sufism, then, al-Bayyātī finds a very suitable framework to express of his human quest for individuation: the constant struggle between exile and the kingdom, death and life, separation and love, belies a universal dialectic between the Real and the unreal, God and the world. In his despair at his experience as a politically committed Iraqi, at the state of modern Arab civilization, and at the human condition universally, the esoteric journey offered some hope of relief and transcendence.

CHAPTER 2: THE THEISTIC EXISTENTIALIST

ŞALĀḤ ʿABD AL-ŞABŪR'S NEO-SUFISM

‘No one knows the dignity of Man and his place in the universe except those who know how to contemplate God perfectly.’ – ibn al-ʿArabī

This chapter will examine the life and work of the late Egyptian poet Şalāḥ ʿAbd al-Şabūr (1931-81) with reference to his increasingly strong inclination towards Sufism. An erudite, widely-read and deeply contemplative man, his unique humanist philosophy was clearly influenced by mystical ideas. His poems and plays, which span a 22-year period, are a direct animation of his meditation on man’s struggle to reconcile inner and outer experiences. The analysis begins by addressing ʿAbd al-Şabūr’s ideas on Sufism and self-knowledge, and his theory of poetic creativity and mystical imagination, which form the foundations of his philosophy. This will be followed by an investigation of his play *The Tragedy of al-Ḥallāj*, in which the themes of individual and collective perfection, human choice and responsibility, ideology and *ijtihād* are all prominent. Finally, the relation between existentialism and mysticism will be examined in the context of his religious quest, with analysis of some relevant poems. To show the commonality between two very different poets, the conclusion will entail the same critical apparatus as that used previously.

Sufism and Self-Knowledge

When Socrates said 'Know your self', he changed the course of humanity, for this philosopher was attempting to divide up the great existential particle known as mankind, the confluence of whose elements we call 'society', and the movement of which we give the name 'history', and whose moments of ecstasy we know as 'art'.²⁹⁴

So Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr begins his autobiographical work *My Life in Poetry*, published twelve years prior to his premature death in 1981. ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's life can be seen as a desperate attempt to fulfil this ambition, which explains his inclination towards Sufism, the quest for self-knowledge in an Islamic context. He later summed this up by saying:

... I love the Sufi experience... because it is very similar to the artistic experience. Writing poetry is a form of *ijtihād*²⁹⁵... The Sufis said that man travels along the mystical path, performs *ijtihād* and devotes himself to the service of God, so that something might open itself to him. This opening is nothing but a revelation from God.²⁹⁶

From the perspective of the Sufi idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the importance of 'knowing the self' is paramount. Indeed, one of the principle meanings of the term *wujūd* is 'finding', or 'presence', and 'the way of finding is "to know ourselves" in order to know God, of which we are, ibn al-ʿArabī insists, in reality, no other.'²⁹⁷ In his quest for self-knowledge, which for the Sufis is coterminous with knowledge of God, ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr therefore subscribes to the Akbarian²⁹⁸ logic of the unity of existence.

This same logic dictates that 'individuals have no self other than what they are with God, and all of what they are belongs to God, not to them. Our true and proper self is no self at all, that is, no self of our own.'²⁹⁹ According to Chittick, the problem with much modern thought is that the 'self', or *nafs*, is reified, given specific, identifiable characteristics, when in fact its only

²⁹⁴ Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī fī al-Shiʿr*, (Dār al-ʿAwda, Beirut, 1969), p. 5

²⁹⁵ *Ijtihād* is an Islamic term referring to individual intellectual or spiritual effort.

²⁹⁶ Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, 'Tajribatī fī al-Shiʿr', *Fuṣūl* 1981, p. 18

²⁹⁷ Peter Coates, *Ibn Arabi and Modern Thought: The History of Taking Metaphysics Seriously*, (Anqa, Oxford, 2002), p. 32

²⁹⁸ 'Akbarian' is the adjective relating to ibn al-ʿArabī, 'al-Shaykh al-Akbar'

²⁹⁹ Chittick, *Sufism*, p. 46

characteristic is that it has none, as in al-Junayd's maxim: 'the water takes on the colour of the container'. The Sufi conception of the self sees it as 'unknown and indefinable', making self-knowledge no small task. Likewise, Coates asserts that for ibn al-ʿArabī, 'the human self is to be properly viewed as essentially and unequivocally a point of vision... which acts as a mirror in the unitive Divine act of Self-Expression.'³⁰⁰ In other words, self-knowledge is a point at which one's consciousness is fully attuned to God's Self-disclosure according to *wahdat al-wujūd*, which may be achieved via the mystical path. *Wahdat al-wujūd* is a philosophy of perfect balance and total reconciliation between the complementary poles of esoteric and exoteric, both on a cosmic and personal level. In order to experience this unity of existence, therefore, the individual must eliminate all conflict or duality within the self, reconciling esoteric and exoteric aspects and becoming 'a witnessing isthmus [*barzakh*] which expresses and synthesizes both the Divine and the Human aspects of the single unique reality.'³⁰¹ This is ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's ultimate objective in his discussion of self-knowledge, and he sees the poet or artist as the archetype of the perfect man, since 'the human self, with its various sensibilities, can only be known through art.'³⁰²

However, given his fascination with mystical thought, it is ironic that ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr chooses to begin with Socrates, the forefather of Western rationalism, whose emphasis on logical proofs moved philosophy away from ancient irrationalists such as Heraclitus. Socrates' insistence on reaching truth through debate presupposes an ontological duality between what ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr refers to as the 'observing self' and the 'observed self', whereas ibn al-ʿArabī would argue that this distinction does not exist. The dichotomy here lies between the respective methods towards self-knowledge: rational/exoteric or super-rational/esoteric. From a Sufi perspective, Socrates effectively cut man off from his inner truth, thereby indeed changing the course of humanity, as ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr points out. Nevertheless, following Socrates, ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr discusses the relation of poetry to self-knowledge:

The meaning of self-reflection is not for man to turn in on himself, but that the self becomes an axis for images of being and of things, and through self-reflection man examines his relationship with these things...The poem is a kind of tripartite dialogue that begins as an idea in the mind of the poet, who is unaware that it has descended from a source higher than man. For the Greeks it was a divine inspiration,

³⁰⁰ Coates, op.cit, p. 124

³⁰¹ *ibid*, p. 125

³⁰² ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī*, pp. 38-9

with Plato arguing that the poets' poems and the soothsayers' prophesies shared the same source, and that the poet sings not with the power of art but with that of the gods.³⁰³

What is significant here is ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's belief that knowledge of the world comes about through self-knowledge, so that man's relationship with exterior reality is transformed through his own self-reflection. This is indicative of a modern interpretation of Sufism as a force for human liberation.

³⁰³ Ibid, pp. 6-7

The Structural Identity of Poetic Creativity and Mystical Imagination

‘Abd al-Ṣabūr therefore alludes to the divine origin of his art. Such ideas are reminiscent of the work of Izutsu and Adonis, who trace all creative and imaginative expression back to a single esoteric source. Likewise, classical Sufi thought sees the cultural product of poetry as a merely secondary or exoteric reflection of the primary Source. ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr is well aware of this when he describes poetic inspiration as a movement from esoteric inspiration to exoteric expression:

There is, then, an original idea that arrives in the mind, bursting forth suddenly like a flash of lightning, which we strive to catch and pin down into word form, through which it gains material existence... Here it is necessary to examine this idea that springs from the calm recesses of the self, which is confined by its languor and yearns to become self-aware. And from one peaceful wave to another arises a whirlpool that wants to acquire form so that it will not lose its existence in its random spinning around itself.³⁰⁴

This idea that great art is the product of the artist’s journey into isolation and self-contemplation is very much consistent with the conceptions of poetic inspiration promulgated by classical Sufi poets. For ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, then, poetic creativity can be divided into three stages, which he compares to three levels of self-awareness achieved on the mystical path. The first of these is called *al-wārid* – the poem in its initial stage of formless inspiration – which ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, in mystical fashion, points out ‘must fully immerse the heart’. He supports this idea by reference to classical Sufi literature:

Dhū al-Nūn, God bless him, said: ‘*al-Wārid* is truth that has come to rouse up hearts’... Al-Qushayrī tells us in his *Risāla* about another expression used by the Sufis, and that is signs and stars and flashes, as a definition for those rapid ideas whose source is unknown to man and which live in the course of his conscious mind, produced not so much by mental effort as by a condition of mental clarity. They are like thunderbolts, disappearing as soon as they appear... That which leaves its influence is the *wārid*. The word *wārid* has a more specific meaning than *ḥads* [intuition] as used by philosophers like Bergson in his introduction to metaphysics... Bergsonian intuition can be useful to interpret great intellectual leaps, but not to interpret psychic leaps, for these must be interpreted by a special concept not found among the philosophers but among the authorities of spiritual endeavour of the prophets and Sufis.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 8

The poem as *wārid* might occur when the starting point of the poem... returns to the mind, and the poet himself can barely decipher its meaning. It may arrive at any time... with barely any prior notice... The poet finds that this *wārid* might open the way to a poem, so he repeats it over and over until one route becomes clear. Then the incubation of the poem is complete and the self wants to show itself in its mirror.³⁰⁵

Thus °Abd al-Ṣabūr rejects Western concepts of intuition and links poetic creativity explicitly to the spiritual self-knowledge of prophets and mystics. Rational thought is implicitly demoted to a secondary status behind the irruption of divine truth. If the *wārid* involves direct esoteric inspiration, the poet must aim to make himself receptive to such inspirations, i.e. to gain self-knowledge. From here °Abd al-Ṣabūr moves on to the second stage of poetic creativity, which is:

the poem as an action following and emanating from the *wārid* stage, for the latter, as the Sufis tell us, must be followed by some action... This is the stage of *al-talwīn wa al-tamkin* [colouring and consolidation], about which al-Qushayrī says:

“As long as the servant remains on the path he comes to the stage of *talwīn*, because he ascends from state to state and moves from one characteristic to the next, leaving one stage (the place of departure) and arriving at a meadow (the place of spring and protection)...”³⁰⁶

In the second stage, therefore, so long as the poet has the requisite strength of mind and spirit to maintain his trajectory, a point of consolidation is reached. This is the difficult stage in which the poet attempts to transform his flashes of inspiration into coherent written material. °Abd al-Ṣabūr clearly sees it as analogous to the Sufī path:

there is a source somewhere that the poet tries to attain in the course of this exhausting journey, and the successful poet is the one who is able to advance some way towards this source until he comes into contact with it, at which point he is separated from himself or the self is separated from itself in order to become aware of it... or we could say that the self has become split into observed and observing self.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Ibid, pp. 8-10

³⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 11

³⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 11

In his view, therefore, the successful poet manages to leave his bodily self behind and become completely identified with the spiritual self, just like the Sufi who manages to stay on the mystical path. From this universal vantage point, fully immersed in his own subjectivity, the poet is able to view things as they are, since external objectivity is by definition impossible. This is the logic behind ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr’s statement that ‘all good art is subjective and objective at the same time’, fulfilling the Sufi simultaneity principle.³⁰⁸ To corroborate this, ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr refers to frequent comparisons between artistic composition and the Sufi journey, adding that ‘in my early days I felt that the poetic journey is that of meaning to the poet, not of the poet to meaning.’ This re-emphasizes his point that creative imagination is akin to a divine gift, offered to each individual who is ready to receive it. He identifies Sufism as the strand of Islamic culture that attempted to find existential meaning in this way, which explains the usefulness of its ready-made terminology for his own theory of poetic creativity. ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr justifies his appeal to Sufism by arguing that:

the Sufis were the first to point out that the spiritual experience is similar to the journey. They saw their striving towards the truth as an exhausting journey full of surprises and anxieties on a long and lonely path which could bring the traveller to a happy end, if God agreed and wished. One of them says: “The journey of the seekers ends in the overcoming of their souls, for if they overcome their souls then they have arrived [at God].” This statement refers not only to the emotional experience, but also to the objective of artistic endeavour, which is precisely overcoming the soul...³⁰⁹

In this process ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr refers to the artist’s desire for the self’s realisation of its self, recalling the Sufi vision of one unique divine source engaged in a constant process of Self-disclosure. For the individual poet, in his view, the construction of a poem is but a symbolic microcosm of this cosmic event, the unlocking of the inherent truth of existence. In such a process the poet is given almost unique status alongside prophets and mystics as those who have reached sufficient self-awareness to knowingly participate in this unveiling.

For ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, then, the process of artistic endeavour is structurally identical with the journey of the mystic towards his god, and the ultimate goal of both is identification with truth

³⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 37

³⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 15-16

and meaning. The stage of the mystical path in which the seeker returns from his state of ecstasy towards external consciousness is therefore equivalent to his third stage of poetic creativity, which is ‘the return of the poet to his normal state prior to the arrival of the *wārid*, prior to his plunging into the journey of *al-talwīn wa al-tamkīn*. At that point the poet cuts off the dialogue to begin judgement, and his critical powers are revealed in his rereading of his poem so he may see where he went wrong.’³¹⁰ Here the poet takes a dispassionate view of the results of his esoteric journey, tightening and editing it according to established poetic criteria. In his state of transformed consciousness he ‘may restore or erase, put forward or back, change expressions, switch lines around and so on in order that the final form of the poem is completed, which is its artistic secret’.³¹¹ This return to the exoteric domain of language and social interaction recalls the Sufi state of *baqā’*, and the resulting poem is the linguistic symbolisation of the journey.

Furthermore, ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr implicitly compares the Nietzschean distinction between the ‘impulsive spontaneity... ecstasy and drunkenness’ of Dionysus and the ‘reason, strategy and exactitude’ of Apollo to the Sufi distinction between *bāṭin* (esoteric) and *ẓāhir* (exoteric). He then expands this assessment of Greek tragedy to all disciplines, not least poetry, in which the ideal work should ‘serve both these masters at the same time... whereby one part should not compromise the harmony of all the other parts and its synchronization with them is closed.’³¹² This closure appears to represent a token of artistic integrity and accomplishment for ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr. Despite the perceived need for form in creating successful poetry, the inspirational aspect – codified in the Sufi technical terms *al-wārid* and *al-talwīn wa al-tamkīn* – show that the esoteric dimension still maintains precedence in his philosophy, even if it requires externalising to acquire complete meaning:

The poet, then, is in need of a transformation from an inner viewpoint, or what some critics call, using a psychological term, profound self-knowledge (*al-istibtān al-dhānī*), to an outer view on life and the world. Poetry thereby becomes not just a personal experience lived by the poet with his feelings and emotions, but also one that stretches out to become an intellectual experience as well, including an attempt to take a position on the world and life in general.³¹³

³¹⁰ Ibid, p. 18

³¹¹ Ibid, p. 18

³¹² Ibid, pp. 19-20

³¹³ Ibid, p. 35

As Reuven Snir³¹⁴ has pointed out, °Abd al-Şabūr's theory is fairly arbitrary in its selection of Sufi sources and somewhat liberal in interpreting them. However, what is significant here is this modern poet's self-conscious examination of his poetic inspiration and method using the analogy of the mystical experience. For the philosopher, truth is an intellectual value; for the mystic, it is something qualitatively different, requiring a quantum leap beyond the tenets of grounded logic. °Abd al-Şabūr effectively joins the poststructuralist anti-philosophers in the Nietzschean tradition when he proposes that this truth cannot be attained through normal rational means, although unlike them, he appears to still believe it exists.

°Abd al-Şabūr makes much of the confusion that can result from sustained intellectual endeavour, something to which his own method of argumentation bears testimony. His attempts to synthesize so much thought into a single scheme produce a slightly strained mixture of ancient Greek philosophy (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle), modern Western philosophy (Nietzsche and Kierkegaard) and classical Sufi thought (al-Qushayrī, al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī, ibn al-°Arabī). However, despite its methodological peculiarities, his subjective theory of poetic creativity clearly intersects with that of other modern poets and thinkers. His suggestion that poetry is the manifestation of a hidden divine truth is comparable to the Adonisian view of poetry as a creative bridge between esoteric and exoteric. To this extent, it contains a religious aspect, although it is only the inner dimension of this experience that drives artistic inspiration. °Abd al-Şabūr himself suggests that Nietzsche's *Überman* (a Western *insān kāmil*) achieves his unique and independent status through a process of Sufi-esque 'resolution and discipline'. He sees the perfect man as one who must give 'a noble answer to the lacking of his age', the 'age of lost truth', which is an omnipresent concern in his work. In this lament for the spiritual barrenness of the age, of which he sees Nietzsche's Zarathustra and his own al-Ḥallāj as examples of inspired human responses, he was much influenced by Eliot, and in particular by *The Wasteland*, which he ironically depicts in his autobiography as standing in the dock, accused of corrupting the concept of 'progress'.³¹⁵

³¹⁴ Reuven Snir, 'The Poetic Creative Process According to Şalāh °Abd al-Şabūr', in Ami Elad, ed, *Writer, Culture, Text: Studies in Modern Arabic Literature*, (York, Fredricton, 1993)

³¹⁵ °Abd al-Şabūr, *Ḥayātī*, pp. 61-3

Individual and Collective Perfection in *The Tragedy of al-Hallāj*

The question of moral opposites has a profound bearing on the quest for individuation and selfhood. These opposites are not only polarities but also complementarities, devoid of meaning without their respective others: the existence of a ‘self’ always presupposes an ‘other’ without which it would be meaningless. An orthodox society defines itself in opposition to certain prescribed ‘others’, who by their particular characteristics are excluded from truth. From the opposite perspective, it is the orthodox who, by virtue of their collective identity, are exiled from truth, just as man is alienated from God prior to mystical purification. The Sufi who is *bāqī billāh*, subsistent in God, recognises no separation between his own identity and that of God: he bears witness to the continuum of *wahdat al-wujūd*. He has transcended the rational division between ‘self’ and ‘other’. However, for the neo-Sufi, individual perfection is impossible without collective perfection, since there is ultimately no separation between the microcosmic and macrocosmic self. One living in an imperfect society cannot himself be perfect, as al-Ḥallāj makes clear in the play. To perfect the self, therefore, requires interaction with others to change the nature of the social environment. But does this give him the right to act in God’s name?

This is the theoretical background to ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr’s most important play, *The Tragedy of al-Ḥallāj* (1965). Its protagonist faces these questions of social responsibility as an extension of his own question for individuation. If truth is by nature esoteric, but society exoteric, how to reconcile the discontinuity between individual and collective selfhood? If the individual self can be perfected through *fanā’* or annihilation of the ego, then *baqā’*, the prophetic consciousness, is the key to collective perfection. But orthodox Islamic society is predicated on Muḥammad’s status as the ‘seal’ of the prophets, and anything that undermines this must by definition be apostasy.

The crux of ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr’s play is the perfection of collective selfhood as a logical and moral extension of the perfection of individual selfhood. Al-Ḥallāj aims to reach God through mystical annihilation (*fanā’*) and subsistence (*baqā’*). As the introduction chapter showed, the latter requires a return to society to rid it of the very same imperfections, illusions and contradictions – the constructed ‘self’ – of which he had previously purged his own individuality. The strengthened, visionary selfhood he has achieved in reaching the stage of *baqā’* supposedly

endows him with the ability to act in truth. The underlying paradox here is that men can only perfect themselves from within, not by external influence. But al-Ḥallāj's individual truth, and its radical message, is surely worthier than the institutional 'truth' in whose name the corrupt government functions. The fact that he must die explains ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's profoundly melancholic persuasion and existential pessimism. Confronting himself with the stark fact that society cannot be perfected, he then illustrates it by portraying a man who tries to achieve it and is sentenced to death by that very same society.

Choice and Responsibility in *The Tragedy of al-Hallāj*

Related to the omnipresent undercurrent of self-knowledge in much of ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr’s work are the two important ethical variables of choice and responsibility. The act of choice is an existential determinant, a definition of selfhood: by consciously choosing certain actions as opposed to others man specifies his identity and individual existence. Here ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr was clearly at pains to emphasize the (perhaps inadvertent) complicity of the masses in their own misfortune, unable to see themselves as free moral agents. The play begins and ends with a candid admission that it was they who really condemned al-Ḥallāj. In their inability or unwillingness to act independently, and by compliantly repeating the self-serving propaganda from the authorities, they seal their own fate:

They said, “Shout ‘Heretic! Heretic!’”

We shouted, “Heretic! Heretic!”

They said, “Shout ‘Let him be killed, his blood be on our heads!’”

We shouted, “Let him be killed, his blood be on our heads!”

Then they said “Go.” And we went.³¹⁶

As a social and human critique, ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr’s play shows that the individuals who collectively constitute society cannot avoid their responsibility for the nature of that society and its regulatory institutions. The poet highlights the absurdity of the categorisation of political opponents in a religiously sanctioned order as ‘heretics’, since it is precisely they who have the potential for progressive change and human emancipation. This was a clear challenge to the dominant discourse in Egyptian society, based on the faltering Nasserist ideology that suffered its fatal blow shortly afterwards in 1967. Al-Ḥallāj’s hero-status revolves precisely around his being rejected as a heretic, resisting the unholy alliance of discourse and power. A heretic in this modern sense undermines the prevailing ideology and foretells of its imminent destruction.

The play can therefore be seen in the light of the Foucauldian analysis of discourse-based identity creation and the general poststructuralist concept of the socially and culturally constructed self. In this regard the concepts of *fanā*’ and *baqā*’ take on meanings beyond their original Sufi

³¹⁶ Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Murder in Baghdad*, tr. K. Semaan, (Leiden, Brill, 1972), p. 5

designation, corresponding to the poststructuralist deconstruction of the 'self' and an imagined 'reconstruction' beyond it. If poststructuralist philosophy, by deconstructing all beliefs, tends inevitably towards a solipsistic ethereality, this is equivalent to the Sufi remaining in a state of *fanā'*, absorbed in God and utterly lacking in any individual selfhood or active personal identity. But for a committed modern writer like °Abd al-Şabūr this cannot be a coherent ethical position. In the words of his revived, neo-Sufi al-Ḥallāj:

Suppose we manage to avoid the world.

How shall we deal with evil then?

...

How can I close my eyes to the world,

And not wrong my own heart?³¹⁷

So al-Ḥallāj chooses to take responsibility for his fellow men by demanding justice, despite the dire personal consequences. In his prose writings °Abd al-Şabūr places a very strong emphasis on human responsibility, particularly that of the artist, whom he claims must 'feel an intimate connection with the [intellectual and spiritual] heritage of the world' in order to 'realise his role as a responsible human being.'³¹⁸ In a revealing passage concerning his religious persuasions, he further defines his vision of human responsibility:

Man's responsibility is to give both form and purity to existence simultaneously. His long struggle is merely an attempt to immerse the mind in matter, and to create total balance and harmony, which he can ultimately offer to God as authentication of his life on earth.³¹⁹

Here he recognises the need for balance between essence (esoteric) and form (exoteric), and implies that the world can only be bettered through self-knowledge. Accordingly, inner personal truth is the catalyst for outer social justice. °Abd al-Şabūr's unswerving belief in man's collective responsibilities for himself and his environment finds expression in his revived al-Ḥallāj, an exponent of free will, human accountability and responsible, dynamic mysticism. Al-Ḥallāj

³¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 12-13

³¹⁸ °Abd al-Şabūr, *Ḥayātī*, p. 79

³¹⁹ Ibid, p. 87

embodies the balance between essence and form. In an attempt to tie his philosophy together, ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr then links responsibility explicitly to the need for self-knowledge:

The pinnacle of truth is truth with the self, which entails man understanding and being aware of his existence, knowing his position on life, and bearing his role and the burden of his existence regardless of how harsh it may be.³²⁰

³²⁰ Ibid, p. 88

Dynamic neo-Sufism in °Abd al-Şabūr's al-Ḥallāj

For °Abd al-Şabūr's al-Ḥallāj an individually perfect self in an imperfect society is a contradiction in terms. This implies the concept of *baqā'*, which explodes the duality of esoteric and exoteric into *waḥdat al-wujūd*. If al-Ḥallāj is a Sufi, then Sufism is a dynamic and liberating force. His religious devotion is matched only by the strength of his call to action against injustice. Like al-Bayyātī, °Abd al-Şabūr's concern is man's interaction with the outer world. He cannot condone a retreat from the world into inaction and solipsism; to remain ensconced in *fanā'* would be to acquiesce in human injustice and therefore be as guilty as its perpetrators. This is the reason why al-Ḥallāj goes beyond the Sufism of his erstwhile comrades into the true subsistence in God:

You mean this cloak?

If it is a chain on my limbs

Which keeps me in my house, amid deaf walls,

And prevents my friends from hearing my words,

I will abandon it, I will cast it off!

...

O Shaykh! If it is a veil woven from our "we are this and we are that"

In order to hide us from the people – and thus be hidden from God,

I will abandon it! I will cast it off!

Witness my oath O God:

This is Your Vestment,

The mark of our servitude to You,

I abandon it! I cast it off, so that You may be pleased with me!

Witness, God!

Witness, God!³²¹

It is clear that in his quest for truth °Abd al-Şabūr's al-Ḥallāj embodies the characteristics exemplified by the perfect man of classical Sufism: a balance of individual spiritual distinction and the dynamic prophetic consciousness. This divine equilibrium is reflected in al-Ḥallāj's opening lines:

³²¹ °Abd al-Şabūr, *Murder*, p. 22

I am explaining to you
 Why the Merciful Lord chooses particular people,
 Singles them out and distributes among them glimmers of his light.
 They are chosen so that they can give balance to this sick world...³²²

This idealised al-Ḥallāj stands alongside the Marxist al-Bayyātī's revolutionary *insān kāmil*, who bridges the esoteric and exoteric domains. If for Marx our mission was not to understand the world but to change it, then for °Abd al-Ṣabūr, changing the world before achieving self-knowledge is the path towards darkness and oppression.

Integral to °Abd al-Ṣabūr's understanding of Sufism, then, is the notion that divine truth must be externalised; indeed, this is the culmination of the mystical journey. From a modern perspective, the annihilated mystic is guilty of the same hypocrisy of those who criticize the political authorities but fail to act. Al-Ḥallāj's socio-political concerns outweigh his spiritual qualities:

The poverty of the poor;
 The hunger of the hungry;
 In such eyes as theirs, I see a glow
 Which means something – something – but I don't know what.
 Words glow in their eyes: I am not sure what they mean.
 Sometimes I think I read there;
 "Now you see me;
 But you are afraid to see me
 God curse your hypocrisy."³²³

These authorities are depicted as authoritarian and ideological throughout, purveyors of a rough official justice. °Abd al-Ṣabūr repeatedly emphasizes the effects of their deceptive propaganda on the masses:

And the chained prisoners, a mad guard stands over them,
 Whip in hand;

³²² Ibid, p. 11

³²³ Ibid, p. 12

Who knows who put it there? Not he –
 He raises it over the back of his charges,
 Men and women enchanted, forgetting the freedom which they lost.
 They look at authorities as though at gods, forsaking God.³²⁴

‘Abd al-Ṣabūr implies that the state ideology, with its self-perpetuating propaganda machine, has reduced people to false, secondary goals, a notion he aligns very closely with the classical Islamic sin of *shirk*, polytheism. This idea that false gods have obscured man’s vision of the truth is comparable to the discourse used simultaneously by radical Egyptian Islamists, who were equally critical of the political authorities. Although ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr’s conception of God may differ radically from that of the Islamist intellectuals, their criticisms are remarkably similar. Whether the concept of *shirk* is used here as a literary tool to express the shortsightedness of the masses, or it has achieved a wider connotation in the modern Egyptian milieu, it is adaptable to secular as well as religious critiques of the *status quo*. For al-Ḥallāj, the Sufi, *shirk* is sin:

A question perplexed me:
 Is associating other Beings with God preordained?
 Otherwise, how would I worship Him alone?
 And concentrate my thought on Him alone?
 In order that I be free from fear,
 And feel secure.³²⁵

Here ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr expresses his own existential doubts and insecurities, implying that the Sufi path may be the only way to escape the insecurity and peril of ‘normal’ human life. The criticism of *shirk* – worshipping false gods – becomes in this view tantamount to the contention that ideology and truth are mutually exclusive: a postmodernist perspective framed in Islamic terminology.

³²⁴ Ibid, p. 13

³²⁵ Ibid, p. 65

The Rejection of Ideology

In *The Tragedy of al-Ḥallāj*, °Abd al-Ṣabūr articulates his personal vision as a synthesis of socialism and mysticism, and at times al-Ḥallāj's speeches become a heady mix of mystical and revolutionary rhetoric. The poet's philosophy descended out of a broadly Marxist paradigm towards a postmodern scepticism of grand narratives and human progress. His strong mystical inclinations further betrayed his misgivings at the inadequacies of the dominant leftist/nationalist ideology, which he knew could not offer a fully human solution to Egypt's problems. Nevertheless, the play defines political commitment as the apex of the spiritual path, even if the protagonist's death shows what a sacrifice that entails. As it develops, however, it becomes ever clearer that al-Ḥallāj himself craves his own execution, which for the temporal authorities represents his punishment from God, but for him represents perhaps the final step in his goal of mystic union. His strong death-drive betrays an overriding desire for the perverse security of transcending the world. As Eagleton points out, 'A martyr who dies deliriously happy is only questionably a martyr. Martyrs give up their lives because they are the most precious thing they have, not because they are only too eager to die.'³²⁶ Such a criticism may be applicable to °Abd al-Ṣabūr's al-Ḥallāj, whose journey towards 'martyrdom' is an ambiguous mixture of mysticism, revolutionary commitment and death-drive. Despite his insistence on the primacy of human responsibility, therefore, there is a deep paradox at the heart of °Abd al-Ṣabūr's play. Behind this death-drive one can sense unmistakably the author's own ambivalence, even attraction, towards death as a retreat from the harsh reality of the world. Al-Ḥallāj's words recall the organic, womb-like security of Sufi *tawakkul*:

Punish me, O my Beloved, for I have divulged the secret

And betrayed our covenant.

Do not forgive me; my heart can bear no more.

Punish me as a man punishes his foe,

Not as a beloved punishes his lover.

Do not forsake me.

Do not turn your face from me.

³²⁶ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, (Penguin, London, 2003) p. 113

Do not kill my soul with indifference.³²⁷

Ambiguously, al-Ḥallāj thirsts for a meaningful death either because he craves a release from the torment of existence towards the infinite bliss of the afterlife, or because he really believes his revelation deserves the ultimate punishment. What makes existence meaningful is precisely that for which he is prepared to relinquish it. But his endorsement of the verdict of execution gives away the author's own psychological torment and ambivalent outlook on life and death:

When man realises that he is condemned to death... he realises that being and non-being are but two faces of the same existence... Man is a slave, not because God commanded him to be, but because life itself is slavery and imprisonment, and how can man escape? Suppose he replaces one place for another as if they were shoes, as Brecht put it, could he replace one being [*kūn*] for another? Man is condemned to life, and the final choice is the acceptance or rejection of this sentence... The only means to reject [it], as Camus said, is suicide.³²⁸

For °Abd al-Ṣabūr, working beyond Marxism, truth equals justice, both individually and collectively. In searching for the ultimate victory of these values, the play suggests the only possible way may be an irrational one, since existence itself is irrational. This is one reason for the author's descent into a postmodern mysticism. For °Abd al-Ṣabūr, even Sufism, with its specifically Islamic discourse and rituals, is just another ideology, and his personal vision transcends it. It is significant that by *taṣawwuf*, he means not just Sufism but mysticism in general, as this extract from a late speech shows:

The poetic experience approximates to the mystical [*ṣūfiyya*] experience through their mutual attempt to obtain truth and arrive at the essence of things, regardless of their externalities. The correlation is in fact very great indeed. In my opinion, the great revelations of [organised] religions are mysticism [*al-taṣawwuf*] itself. If religion is confined to public worship and to everyday conduct and procedures, without attempting to reach the essence of truth, it becomes another form of oppression. It must be moved to a higher plane to become a form of spiritual assurance and serenity, and it is this plane that Muslim,

³²⁷ °Abd al-Ṣabūr, *Murder*, p. 33

³²⁸ °Abd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī*, pp. 67-76

Christian, Jewish and Hindu mystics [*mutaṣawwifīn*], of which I have seen many, have tried to articulate. Each of them attempts to arrive at full knowledge and understanding of the higher universal truth.³²⁹

This quote underlines once again ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr’s preoccupation with mysticism and his equation of poetic creativity with the mystical journey. Confined to its exoteric dimension, the religious experience is a tool of oppression; in its esoteric dimension, it is the inspiration for creative activity and human liberation.

³²⁹ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, ‘Tajribatī’, p. 18

Ijtihād: prophets, poets and philosophers

We may now examine more closely ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr’s above-quoted view that writing poetry is ‘a form of *ijtihād*’. The concept of *ijtihād* is a vital one for him, as he sees the individual’s personal struggle as integral to the meaning and purpose of human life. He elaborates this idea by saying:

There are three kinds of individual effort [*ijtihād*], each of which tries to extend their vision through man to help him to overcome his self, so that he can give his life meaning. These are religion, philosophy and art. The prophet, the philosopher and the artist are authentic voices, whose authenticity embraces all kinds of human life in order to organise it and overcome its chaos and discord ..³³⁰

Thus ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr sees each of these individuals as exponents of *ijtihād*, through which their lives acquire meaning. Each of them ‘sees a deficiency’ in the present reality and therefore has ‘a desire to reform the world’. Thus their efforts attempt to engender truth, justice and freedom, which may or may not be conceived as a journey towards God. What differentiates poets from philosophers and prophets, in his view, is the nature and direction of their respective messages. The latter are liable to construct ‘an ordered methodology’ in order to overcome such deficiencies, whereas poets ‘know that their route is that of excitement and emotion, and that their discourse is directed towards the heart’. Here again ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr relates his art not to systematic rationalism but to esoteric mysticism, which he believes has ‘a deeper effect than expression through mere language’. His imagery recalls the Sufi discourse concerning direct communication from man’s heart, the metaphor for a fully integrated consciousness. Further, these individuals share the characteristic of taking an ‘acute and illuminating’ view of life as a complete whole, the pressure of which ‘often weighs heavily on their souls, so that they are racked with doubt as to the possibility of reform. Therefore in the life of every poet, prophet or philosopher there are moments of bitter despair or total revulsion of reality and nature.’ It seems to be the overcoming of such a moment of despair that gives life meaning. ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr supports this argument using the examples of, among others, Muḥammad, Jesus and Nietzsche, whom he quotes as saying “No artist is able to bear reality, for it is in the nature of artists to be unable to put up with the world.” This theme of reform, of overcoming the self and the world, is one of the central preoccupations in ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr’s work. He recognizes that it is essentially a

³³⁰ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī*, pp. 68-9

religious mission, as the lives of prophets and radical Sufis show. For him, therefore, it is a vital part of man's own inner spiritual quest, and a vocation for poet, prophet and philosopher alike, to bring freedom, justice and truthfulness to the world. This is how °Abd al-Şabūr conceives of the poet as an expressly religious and political figure. But the question of how to establish these values is so taxing that he is often driven to silence. In one poem, having asked himself about the meaning of freedom, justice, love, honour and truthfulness, he concludes:

[These] questions crowd around me; I have no answer
 I beg them for mercy, and sleep.
 When morning comes
 I wander in the streets, in the sun, in days;
 The black foot asks me
 About the meaning of the word
 'Silence'.³³¹

With his theory of personal struggle, °Abd al-Şabūr is effectively forcing open the 'gates of *ijtihād*' within Islamic history. Again, this radical 'desire to transcend towards reform of the world', albeit esoterically oriented in his case, links him clearly with Islamist thinkers of the 1960s, such as Sayyid Quṭb, who was undertaking his own *ijtihād* with his modern exegesis of the Qur'ān. °Abd al-Şabūr's *ijtihād*, like that of Quṭb, emanates from a strong sense of human responsibility, articulated so forcefully in *The Tragedy of al-Ḥallāj*. He accepts this responsibility unflinchingly as inevitable in a godless modern world where human beings create their own destiny. He exhibits a genuine passion to live life fully before death, but real existence brings both individual and collective duties, and humanity has only itself to blame. This philosophy of responsibility recalls the discipline and effort of the Sufi, who may be rewarded by God's mercy:

God does not torture us with life, but He gives us what we deserve, because He has delivered us innocent into the world... We could have made it into a verdant heaven of justice, goodwill and love. Instead we have sullied it with poverty, enslavement and tyranny. Nothing remains for us on the table of life except corpses for that is what we deserve...³³²

³³¹ Şalāḥ °Abd al-Şabūr, *Şajjar al-Layl*, pp. 62-5

³³² °Abd al-Şabūr, *Ḥayātī* p. 86

Towards his middle age, this disgust with human actions increasingly inspires speculations on death and nothingness as a relief from existence:

Do you loathe me so much, oh Lord, that you would blow a breath
Into the gaunt pipe of my body...?

...

Turn your commandment away from me, oh giver of blessings,
Choose a different cup for your magnanimity³³³

The yearning – almost prophecy – for death is a feature not only of the mystical life but also occurs in existentialist philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis. It is intimately connected with an innate sense of loss and vulnerability, as if the protagonist has been cast out from a safe cave (as in Plato), the mother's womb (as in Sufi *tawakkul*), or a garden of Paradise (as in the Adam myth). Both mystics and philosophers, in their different ways, have believed that finding the absolute truth would repair this loss. °Abd al-Şabūr's *ijtihād* collates these two cognitive strands and fuses their common features into a new and fertile compound.

³³³ °Abd al-Şabūr, *al-Ibhar fī al-Dhakira*, (al-Waṭan al-°Arabī, Beirut, 1979) pp. 45-6

ʿAbd al-Sabūr, Existentialism and Mysticism

Existentialism is a philosophy of the human subject, of what it means to be an authentic and fully developed human being. It explores the nature of human potential, through ‘the internally experienced worlds of human subjectivity, intersubjectivity and encounter.’³³⁴ In this sense, it is not dissimilar to mysticism, which is also an expression of man’s inner potential. Sufi *baqāʾ* is an inspired human intersubjectivity, since the mystic in this state recognizes a political responsibility to complement his inner accomplishment.

Existentialism in Europe was a historically rooted reaction that tried to reassert the intrinsic dignity of the human subject over and against all those industrial, technological, and social processes which tend to dehumanise and diminish the value of an individual. It therefore naturally focused on the inner realms of human existence, as a return to the truth of the self. Both existentialism and neo-Sufism resulted from specific socio-political and cultural conditions. Where existentialism was generally the philosophical product of post-Enlightenment, industrial Europe, neo-Sufism should be viewed against the canvas of the post-colonial Middle East, which inherited the trappings of modernity in the form of industry and technology, but an ongoing political and economic subservience. In both cases, the despair of the human in time turns him to confront the timeless questions of existence.

Yet however much human subjects are fashioned by prevailing external conditions, there remains something unique and inexpressible within them that is the object of both existentialist and mystical searching. Human existence is seen by existentialist philosophers not as essentially immutable but as potential being. ‘Human beings are born unfinished and have to define and create themselves...’³³⁵ Analogously, the human being through his birth acquires a lack, or becomes fallen, and may travel the mystical path to regain it and restore himself to wholeness.

Like al-Bayyātī, the neo-Sufi ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr was strongly influenced by existentialist thought. There are some clear affinities between existentialism and mysticism which may allow us some insight into his preoccupation with, and amalgamation of, both cognitive systems. Coates points

³³⁴ Coates, op.cit, p. 68

³³⁵ Ibid, p. 68

out that they both display ‘an astonishing freshness of vision into the overwhelming immediacy and meaning of existence... [and] emphasize [its] sheer givenness, variety and primordially... For both, the primary datum is existence,’³³⁶ from which all else follows. Both systems therefore effectively restore the Cartesian ‘I think therefore I am’ into ‘I am therefore I think’. In the absence of an Archimedean point of universal, objective knowledge, the human being strives to complete the subjective process of total self-realization. This is the process of ‘finding’ our selves, as is suggested by the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, in which all things find their true selves, i.e. become aware that they are at once themselves and part of a larger Self.

Choice is an integral aspect of existentialist philosophy and, as noted above, is closely related to human identity. It is the real human choices, ‘those decisions which determine the quality and depth of human authenticity’, often at times of crisis, that concern existentialist philosophers. The basic human project is ‘to choose, or fail to choose, the kind of human being we want to become’. Likewise, the choice of ‘repentance’ is the starting point of the mystical path. The mystic resolves to travel a long and arduous path without prior knowledge of his reward, which requires faith and discipline. This choice, too, is a turning point that occurs in a moment of crisis in the individual’s life. Once accepted, it may bring a new sense of authenticity and freedom. However, freedom can also be a frightening prospect, and the objective of Sufis is arguably to escape into total dependence on God. The Sufi *tawakkul* involves a relinquishment of their individual freedom and total trust in God, which partly explains the widely-held view of Sufism as passive. °Abd al-Ṣabūr often seems prone to this fear of freedom, prompting the search to close his own psychological circle, while at other times he suggests that this cannot lead to fully authentic selfhood, and that human responsibility must outweigh the desire for security.

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) is regarded as a founder of modern existentialism. Like Socrates, Muḥammad and ibn al-°Arabī before him, he exhorted people to know their own selves. He searched for “the idea for which I can live or die”, for something in which he could place total faith. According to Kierkegaard, ‘we must become our unique selves; we must become “the single individual, which everyone can be and should be”.’ This idea has strong parallels with the Sufi path to God, Jungian individuation, and the concept of the perfect

³³⁶ Ibid, pp. 71-2

man, or Anthropos archetype. It suggests that the Truth – God – lies deep within each individual, who must struggle to perfect themselves (*fanā'*) before turning outwards to their fellow human beings (*baqā'*). Collective perfection is therefore the logical corollary of individual perfection, as depicted in °Abd al-Ṣabūr's al-Ḥallāj. But, as Kierkegaard notes, "the crowd is untruth": society cannot undergo the same mystical annihilation as the individual, since it is an inner pursuit. This accounts for the difficulties over collective perfection implicit in the play.

The central existentialist themes are freedom, choice, authenticity, commitment and potential. In exploring human potential, existentialism is a philosophy of human *becoming*, inherently progressive and future-oriented. It denotes the dynamic potential and nature of human consciousness. For existentialists, human identity is a continual act of self-creation and self-projection into an open future, where we become what we choose to be. Similarly, the mystical journey implies a progression in self-awareness and authenticity. °Abd al-Ṣabūr is attracted to it for these very characteristics, which he deems sadly lacking in modern Egyptian society.

Both mysticism and existentialism, then, are concerned with man's relationship with his self, on an individual and collective level. They see the need for self-knowledge, self-awareness and self-creation in similar terms, but differ with regard to their conceptual apparatuses and their means of achieving them. In existentialist philosophy, the individual is conceived of as possessing an irreplaceable and unique centre of consciousness, despite the historical and cultural conditions surrounding it. Mysticism, too, is an enquiry into the universal logic of human subjectivity and consciousness, exploring the recesses of the self for an esoteric God. Moreover, the goal of the mystical path is to achieve all-encompassing consciousness that can apprehend the true nature of reality and man's place in it. This consciousness offers the possibility of self-generated change as a result of one's own decisions and effort, or *ijtihād*. Self-consciousness makes man aware of his potential for improvement, as well as the consequences of ignoring it.

Existentialism asserts that the human subject cannot be reified: it is an *existence (das Sein)* rather than an *existent (das Seiende)*. 'Human subjectivity can transcend social or historical ideological reifications of its nature,³³⁷ as well as the cognitive restrictions of its time. In fact, both

³³⁷ Ibid, p. 70

existentialists and mystics would say, this transcendence is a vital condition of true existence. Each human being, therefore, as an existence, is its own unique cosmos, which is a microcosm of the larger cosmos. This is why Sufis postulate that man has been made in the form and nature of God. Kierkegaard's existentialism, in particular, contains some quasi-mystical ideas that are later reflected in ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's thought. For him, 'the primordial relationship was between the single individual and God... he views the human subject as embracing both the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal and... characterizes the deepest inward striving of the human soul as a desire to go beyond the finite self to the infinite self.' This was very much the case for ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, who, like Kierkegaard, can be described as a 'theistic existentialist', someone for whom the 'primary human existential encounter is with the spiritual'.

Mysticism has been defined as: 'our path is not to seek God but to seek God's vision of Himself as us'. In other words, God is the universal subject, and existing things are both the subject in the sense that they are part of Him, whether aware of it or not, and the object in the sense that they are secondary to Him. God is the Existent; all beings and things are existents. The responsibility of man, therefore, is to acquire a heightened awareness such that he can exemplify this eternal truth in all his attributes, in other words, to become *al-insān al-kāmil*.

Neo-Sufis such as ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr recognise that mere philosophy alone is incapable of fully embracing the inner truth of man's authenticity. The allure of mysticism lies in its greater, more direct access to that comprehensive subjectivity. As Coates observes, 'it is only from the point of view of the Unity of Existence that the true nature of human potential can be properly appreciated.'³³⁸ That is to say, a view comprehensively encompassing and balancing both aspects of reality, as in the doctrine of *al-insān al-kāmil*. This appears to be the very conclusion ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr reaches in his attempts towards complete self-knowledge. The Sufi path is the key to an extraordinary existential and human possibility in which the individual is fully aware of his role and responsibility in the world. Whether the subsistent individual can fulfil that responsibility is a question ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr cannot answer, except to relate what happened to al-Ḥallāj:

³³⁸ Ibid, pp. 73-4

... the play presented the question of the role of the artist in society. Al-Ḥallāj's answer was that he should speak... and die.

It seems that a committed death is ultimately preferable to a meaningless life, that faith in something – mankind, God, truth – is the ultimate objective for the human subject. He continues:

Al-Ḥallāj's torture was a symbol of the torture of intellectuals in most modern societies, of their helplessness and bewilderment between the sword and the word, when they have rejected the idea that their aim is to achieve personal salvation by throwing the problems of existence and mankind off their shoulders, and chosen instead to carry the burden of humanity.³³⁹

The Sufi concept of *baqā'* is implied here than anywhere else in his prose writings. Human responsibility is the key to self-knowledge and self-perfection. *Baqā'* is as much political as it is spiritual, the duality between them yielding to the singularity of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. For ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr it is an expression of his ultimate faith in humanity. What troubles him, however, is the artist's powerlessness, stranded between words and action, or as he puts it in the poem *Abstractions*, between the 'sword of futility' and 'the desert of inactivity'. Since power and action so often lead to darkness and oppression, he is left to cling to a desperate faith in words:

The Tragedy of al-Ḥallāj was an expression of my one great faith that has remained pure and unblemished, that is, faith in the word.

However much ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr is convinced that words are man's greatest weapon, a sense of frustration and disillusionment remains, since they alone cannot rid the world of evil. In the play, al-Ḥallāj occupies ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's paralysing ethical position between the sword and the word. If only he could synthesize the two into a 'seeing sword', i.e. achieve the dynamic action of human responsibility without losing the purity of the vision:

Men like myself do not carry swords.

For a sword in a blind hand becomes the instrument of blind death.

...

³³⁹ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī*, p. 120

Suppose my words sang for the sword.
 The sound of its blows
 Would echo their syllables, their commas, and their rhymes.
 And between one consonant and another
 A head that once moved, rolls,
 And a heart that once rejoiced, breaks,
 And an arm is cut off at the sounds of the letters' poetical rhymes.
 How unhappy I would then be: how unhappy!
 My words would have killed.

...

Where are the persecuted and where are the persecutors?
 Has any among the victims not persecuted
 A neighbor, a spouse, a child, a maid, or a slave?
 Has any among them not wronged the Lord?
 Who will give me a seeing sword?
 Who will give me a seeing sword?³⁴⁰

Man must first cure himself of his own blindness before he may be a force for good. This is why 'Abd al-Ṣabūr's dramatic hero is a mystic, the process of *fanā'* being the cure for blindness after which enlightened action supposedly becomes possible.

³⁴⁰ 'Abd al-Ṣabūr, *Murder*, pp. 49-50

The Religio-Existential Quest

‘Abd al-Ṣabūr’s life can ultimately be seen as a religio-existential quest, a mission to rediscover faith, very much in the Kierkegaardian mould. Working against the grain of the zeitgeist, Kierkegaard stressed the integrity of the individual and was highly dubious of collective hypotheses. Like ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, he was a lonely, alienated and introverted figure who had a strong belief in duty and self-discipline and despairingly compared his position to that of an immovable chess piece, a metaphor the Egyptian poet may have consciously emulated in his early poem *Night Journey*. With his talk of ‘the dark background which, from the very earliest time, was part of my life,’ it is not difficult to see the reasons for the later poet’s affinity with his thought, which also issued in a similar atmosphere of ‘gloom and religious guilt... a deep sense of personal inadequacy and confusion’. Both thinkers’ inward suffering eventually prompted them to retire into a private existence,³⁴¹ meditating on the most meaningful relationship in their lives, the private attachment to God.

In pondering the various relationships between poetry, creativity, responsibility, self-knowledge, truth and justice, ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr cites the Kierkegaardian pronouncement that ‘one can never escape the idea of God’, and endorses his suggestion that human existence is in essence religious torment. The life journey described in his autobiography supports this view, taking him through three distinct stages of psychic development: fervent religious belief in his youth, a long period of doubt and confusion, and finally back to a reconciliation with God. ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr traces these stages to show that he had never truly abandoned the idea of God. His renewed spiritual persuasion represents his attempt to close his psychological circle, in order to regain the lost innocence and truth that has engulfed him as a modern subject in ‘the age of lost truth.’³⁴²

‘Abd al-Ṣabūr reveals his intense spiritual awareness by relating an episode from his youth, when his attempt to see God led him to emulate the behaviour of Sufi *shaykhs*:

³⁴¹ P. Gardiner, *Kierkegaard: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, OUP, 1988), pp. 3-6

³⁴² Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, *Aqūlu Lakum*, (al-Maktaba al-Tujārī lil-Ṭibā‘a wa al-Tawzī‘ wa al-Nashr, Beirut, 1961) p.

In my early youth I was extremely religious, so much so that I remember deciding to pray for a whole night to reach the state spoken of by pious men, whereby their hearts are emptied of everything except the memory [*dhikr*] of God. I began in the usual way, with my mind occupied by the various issues of life. I recited the verses of the Qur'ān, and tried hard to empty myself of all ideas except God. I continued like this until I almost broke down in total exhaustion, and the fatigue and concentration sent me into a state of ecstasy in which I thought I saw God. I remember some of my family coming to interrupt me for fear that I was going mad. I only recall this whole experience faintly, since I was fourteen at the time. I remember how I must have looked: a young lad with his head covered, kneeling and prostrating on an old mat, starting his prayers and remembering the story of that pious man who was bitten by a snake during his prayers, but who did not even feel the bite or move until he had finished praying. I tried my best [*ijtahadu*] to reach this very high stage, by kneeling, prostrating, standing up, sitting down. The night flew past and my knees began to give way, but suddenly I rose from one of my prostrations and saw before me a halo of light. I nearly fell unconscious with alarm and terror. I remember that at that moment I was reading the Qur'ānic passage: "And Moses was struck down by lightning." This experience did not grant me a divine peace [*sakīna*], but probably increased my anxiety. If it was a gift from God, then why did He not give it to me without effort, and if He was revealing Himself to me here then why did I not see Him in other places?³⁴³

Several aspects of this passage demonstrate °Abd al-Şabūr's lifelong instinct towards Sufism: the *dhikr*, the meditative concentration on God; the ecstasy and attendant loss of bodily sentience and rational faculties; the vision of God and its overwhelming force; the circle of light, and so on. He goes on to describe his bewilderment at this event and his vain attempts to repeat it, until finally religious doubts began to gnaw at him and he gave up. His reading of Darwin and Nietzsche heralded the second stage of his life, about which he tellingly says that 'I became assured, *or at least tried to be assured*, [emphasis added] of my position on [the death of God].' This is the stage of confusion and spiritual sickness which haunts so many of his poems, only increasing with his continued intellectual endeavours. It was in this stage that he engaged most with the leftist/nationalist ideology of the day. However, with the failures of socialist thought and practice becoming clearer, and the disasters of °Abd al-Nāşir brewing on the horizon, the way was prepared for the final, definitive stage, the return to the esoteric:

³⁴³ °Abd al-Şabūr, *Ḥayātī*, pp. 80-1

I searched for an object of worship other than society and ended up back with man, and the idea of man in his temporal and spatial totality lead me once again towards thinking about religion.

Thus I became religious [*mu'allih*] once again, and this remains my chosen psychic position. That is, our sterile and absurd life is not linked to a general and total idea, to a striving after perfection. For what is perfection? Is it technical and industrial progress? Has all that added anything to the ideals and morals of man, indeed, has it even made a worthy contribution to his material life and protected him from poverty and crime? May the revolution then be on behalf of existence, and may it return to where it started, and may perfection be the return to God, as pure as it was at the moment of departure from Him.³⁴⁴

With this rejection of totalising narratives and poignant re-espousal of the inner divinity of man, °Abd al-Şabūr's psychic life journey came full circle. His contempt here for material and technological 'progress' is all too clear, as is his misgivings about systematic thought and the notion of perfection. His much sought-after refuge can only be found in the entirely subjective relationship between man and Self. He continues:

I have come to be at peace now with God, and I believe that every addition to the knowledge, intelligence or sensitivity of humanity is a step towards perfection [*kamāl*], or a step towards God. I believe that the purpose of existence is the triumph of good over evil through a long, bitter struggle, so that man may return to his innocence, which is not a blind, careless innocence as it was at the time of his departure from God, but an innocence of overcoming the experience and coming out of it as gold comes out of fire, having gained form and purity.³⁴⁵

The circularity of °Abd al-Şabūr's life journey is evident in his talk of the return to lost innocence, something for which he, like the Sufis, is always searching. In his vision of a strengthened and transcending innocence, the influence of Sufi doctrine seems likely. This is the perfection [*kamāl*] for which mystics strive, and in this respect °Abd al-Şabūr was a modern mystic. His psychological cycle mirrors the three life stages described by Kierkegaard as the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious, the latter being the most definitive of man. This

³⁴⁴ °Abd al-Şabūr, *Ḥayātī*, p. 86

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 86-7

philosopher of faith once compared himself to a two-faced Janus: “with one face I laugh, with the other I weep.”³⁴⁶ In a similar vein, °Abd al-Şabūr writes:

Democratus and Heraclitus were two philosophers; the former considered the human condition absurd and futile, and whenever he was among people his face would display amusement and ridicule, while the latter felt pity and compassion for it, and never a day passed when sadness was absent from his face or tears from his eyes.³⁴⁷

°Abd al-Şabūr clearly empathised with Kierkegaard in this self-appraisal and saw himself as a bewildering mixture of Democratus and Heraclitus, a conflict that informed much of his literary output. What has been said of Kierkegaard is valid for him, namely that he was ‘profoundly dissatisfied with the emptiness of his existence and with his inability to find some centre or focus for his life. On the one hand, he complains of the futility of seeking pleasures which invariably left in their wake feelings of ennui and malaise; on the other, he expresses impatience with learning in so far as this is regarded as a purely dispassionate pursuit of knowledge and understanding’.³⁴⁸ It is precisely these conflicting perspectives that are summed up in one of his late poems, *Abstractions*, in which he is caught between recognizing the futility of existence and the desire to change it. For °Abd al-Şabūr, the only way out of this quandary is to reassert one’s faith in the strongest possible terms, in contradistinction to reason. In transcending the need for empirical proof, and providing a defining narrative and focus to an individual’s life, faith can, for Kierkegaard, reaffirm one’s essential human integrity. For °Abd al-Şabūr, it salvages him from the nightmare of the modern into the relative safety of the postmodern. Throughout his endless soul-searching, °Abd al-Şabūr envies those who have faith, perhaps partly since it absolves the individual of awkward questions over human freedom and choice. This human freedom, once accepted in a godless world, is a mixed blessing: all it leaves is his deep sense of responsibility and the tragic impossibility of ever fulfilling it. Both thinkers suggest that man may often rather *not* be free, and it is in faith that he finds shelter – another significant theme in his poetry – from this shattering freedom. This is an important factor in °Abd al-Şabūr’s return to God. He has looked too deep into the well of human existence not to be traumatized by it and, just like the Sufis, yearns for the relief of returning to an all-encompassing God. The mystical secrets that

³⁴⁶ Gardiner, op.cit, p. 6

³⁴⁷ Montaigne, quoted in *Hayātī*, p. 53

³⁴⁸ Gardiner, op.cit, p. 7

strangle him are inexpressible by their very nature, knowable only from within. Thus his outer mission of collective perfection is aborted and he is left adrift in the silence of the esoteric.

Analysis of Individual Poems

As in chapter 2, our attention now turns to analysis of particular poems in order to further demonstrate the progression of °Abd al-Şabūr's mystical inclinations. The selected poems span four of his volumes, from *I Say Unto You* (1961) to *Sailing in Memory* (1979).

I Say Unto You (1961)

This long poem, which is divided into eight sections, encapsulates the poet's vision of himself as a preacher in the manner of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, but with mystical tendencies. The poet implies that only a radical life choice can solve the ethical questions that so trouble him. In part 4, entitled *Words*, we find the Ḥallājīan dilemma between words and deeds:

Didn't they tell you in the Book that in the beginning
 There was the Word – the Almighty Word –
 Didn't they tell you in the Book that truth is a matter of words?
 But I say unto you that truth is a matter of deeds.³⁴⁹

Here he acknowledges that his quest for truth must be more than a matter of words, yet still he cannot find the 'seeing sword' that al-Ḥallāj craves. Perhaps he was aware here of the exile of language from truth, but his vision encompasses a fusion of right word and deed, which he sees as 'two exalted wings' of the same balanced body. His conviction that words are meaningless without deeds is echoed in the next section, *The Saint*, where we glimpse his personal epiphany. After the long night of uncertainty and confusion, he reveals that:

I saw the reality of the world
 I heard the music of the star, the water and the flowers
 I saw God in my heart.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ °Abd al-Şabūr, *Aqūlu*, pp. 57-8

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 61

This is a direct analogy to the long esoteric path undertaken by the Sufis, who are rewarded with the vision of God. He follows this with a symbolic throwing of his books into the fire, implying that all intellectual knowledge and learning is but a hindrance from God. As in Sufi doctrine, it is the heart, not the head, that leads man's wayward ship to the safety of the shore:

In the recklessness of our blithe time
 We break, then we thank our guiding heart
 That it anchors us on the shore of certainty, for the mind has led us astray.³⁵¹

‘Abd al-Ṣabūr repeatedly employs the metaphor of the lost sailor finding land to convey his sense of salvation in rediscovering faith after the long period of doubt and confusion in which he read countless books in search of truth. The image of the sea is ambiguous: it conveys the ideas of exile and bewilderment, but at other times it can represent the bliss of being lost in God's infinite Ocean. However, it is important to note that, despite this inner victory and the accompanying exclamations of mystical rapture, he is still very much concerned with his fellow men:

I felt my fevered body throbbing like the heart of the sun
 I felt that the corners of my heart were filled with wisdom
 I felt that I had become a saint
 And that my mission...
 Was to sanctify you.³⁵²

Therefore, as with the Sufi state of *baqā'*, esoteric enlightenment leads directly to a universal mission, with his desire for self-purification extending to encompass all mankind. Now, however, the poet is experienced enough to understand what sacrifices this entails, as the final section title makes clear: 'I spurn you... in order to know you.' After enjoying his friends' companionship he must return at night to his loneliness, where he can confront his self and know it fully. Only then can he return in full knowledge and awareness to face his fellow men. This introversion-extroversion dialectic clearly corresponds to the elevation from *fanā'* to *baqā'*.

³⁵¹ Ibid, p. 59

³⁵² Ibid, p. 62

Exodus (1964)

Here ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr envisions a cathartic *hijra* or emigration as an escape from his tortured existence. This emigration represents his inward journey in search of God, who, according to the mystics, is present in the deepest recesses of man’s heart. The poet’s model here is the original, archetypal *hijra* of the Prophet Muḥammad through the desert from Mecca to Medina in 622CE, as part of his prophetic mission. ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr insinuates a parallel between the Prophetic *hijra* and his own spiritual *hijra*, through which he aims to accomplish ‘my only wish... to kill this burdensome soul of mine’. This directly evokes the Sufi disdain for the soul, which is seen as a veil between the lover and Beloved. There is also a subliminal reference to the Sufis’ reverence of Muḥammad as their first *shaykh* and the paradigm of mankind, *al-insān al-kāmil*. ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr himself holds the Prophet in similar regard, and there is a clear affinity between his sense of spiritual dispossession and the latter’s status as an orphan. He also empathizes with Muḥammad’s concern at human suffering, which he resolved to overcome despite the great personal cost. ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr’s autobiography depicts the Prophet as an example of the inspired revolutionary who transcends his humanity to carry this heavy burden.

The physical journey through the desert in the poem symbolizes his long and difficult spiritual journey, leaving behind his original city – the exterior world with which he has become so disillusioned – and traveling until he reaches the city of light – the interior world of God. Through his *hijra*, the poet is trying to flee outside of himself, to be exiled from his unbearable self, but he has no foreknowledge of success. The danger of the mystical path is that the goal is invisible until it is reached. ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr struggles with this burden of faith, wondering whether this magical ‘city of light’ really exists or is just an illusion.

Does the tough spiritual discipline of the path, ‘the torments of your journey’, really lead to God and salvation, or is it all simply absurd and futile? The poet seems unsure and pessimistic, but given the degree of his suffering in the world he sees no alternative.

ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr plays on the ambiguous state of exile in this poetic narrative. Man is somehow more real, more alive, when he is in exile, just as the other is the key to the self. The *hijra* is a retreat into exile in order to know the self and live in truth, as conveyed by Theodor Adorno’s

ironic dictum: 'It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home.'³⁵³ Suffering is a necessary part of the mystical journey, just like the healing of a wound. For ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, the embrace of exile in the desert is coterminous with the act of spiritual cleansing:

The torture of the journey is my purification³⁵⁴

From this comes the idea that the security of death, the shedding of the unbearable soul, is preferable to this hazardous and painful life, just as the Sufi undergoes *fanā* 'dies' and is reborn:

And death in the desert is my permanent resurrection
If I die then I would live forever in the city of light.³⁵⁵

Death, as the Sufis say, is the way to reach God. But this ultimately requires a leap of faith, since the perfect city of light, just as for al-Bayyātī, is always distant and opaque. Despite their different experiences, the intertextuality between the two poets is clear. Both search for this invisible lost paradise, and both eventually admit that it cannot exist in this world. The use of the light metaphor to express divine perfection is common to both, as is the concept of death and resurrection in God. This concern with death shows how ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr combines the psychological impulses of the medieval Sufi with those of the modern existentialist.

³⁵³ Adorno, quoted in Said, op.cit, p. 184

³⁵⁴ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, *Aḥlām al-Fāris*, p. 74

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 70

Dearer Than Eyes (1964)

The Sufi idea of sudden illumination after a long journey in the darkness recurs here in one of ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr’s most optimistic and romantic poems. He uses this metaphor to convey his feelings of love, with a strong link between romanticism and esoteric fulfillment, as discussed in the introduction. The poet continually describes his love in terms reminiscent of Sufi ecstasy:

Your palms are blessings you have given to a poor journeyman
 A wayfarer on the road of love and bliss
 Who travels without provision
 On a lonely mission
 And suddenly good news appears before him...³⁵⁶

Sufi poetry is renowned for its multi-leveled ambiguity, addressing both the human beloved and the divine Beloved simultaneously. Human love, for the Sufi, is merely part of the greater divine Self-love or Self-disclosure, just as in Lacanian theory it represents an attempt to replace the organic lost Real. The poet plays on this concept here, equating his love with something altogether more cosmic, the return to innocence lost:

Your eyes are my final resting place...
 With them, I know that I have reached
 The end of the journey.³⁵⁷

This is structurally analogous to the return from exoteric loss to esoteric fulfillment for which the Sufi strives. ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr expresses such a movement in various ways, each mystical in motivation. Sometimes it is recovery from the disease of life to the psychological purity of love:

Your gentle devotion cleanses me
 As the clouds cleanse the sky³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 76

³⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 75

³⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 77

Sometimes it is portrayed as a movement from sterility to fertility and rebirth:

My sterile, unending sorrow finally dies,
My face, lit by your smile, greets life anew³⁵⁹

Or by reference to the source of all earthly life:

I stretch out my palms to the sun
And raise my eyes to the stars³⁶⁰

These are the ecstatic words of one who has found his identity in love. This is very similar to al-Bayyātī's later espousal of 'the religion of love'; in both cases the psychological lack has been fulfilled. This love, which 'Abd al-Ṣabūr expresses here as 'our safe paradise', is also very reminiscent of the state of *tawakkul*, which is expressed in Sufi imagery as the union of two lovers. *Tawakkul* fulfils a yearning for the lost innocence of youth, whereby the mystic becomes dependent on God as a child is on the mother. The God or mother figure represents safety and companionship, prior to the psychological split, from which the trajectory of life removes the subject. The goal of the Sufi, like the lover, is to restore himself to this psychological position and thereby regain his lost security.

The idea of the fall from original organic purity and innocence into the world of time and space is strongly implied here. The departure from the timeless esoteric realm generates a sense of emptiness:

From what pure source does our love flow
And flood us with happiness as if we were children
Who have not yet wandered in time?³⁶¹

The poet must return to the esoteric, either through romantic or mystical union. He constantly attempts to elevate his human love to the level of the divine:

³⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 77

³⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 77

³⁶¹ Ibid, p. 78

When we are alone together
 What perfection no beauty ever witnessed
 God is fair to us, and the world is still good...
 Love, my dearest, is our compassionate lord
 Listen and obey him.³⁶²

This is one of the rare occasions when ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr seems content to focus his attention purely on the personal, as he fuses his self with that of his beloved. In Sufi terms, it is as if he is remaining in the blissful cocoon of *fanāʾ*, in which the mystic's identity is entirely fused into God's. Although the poet's profound sense of duty and compassion usually leads him to contemplate *baqāʾ*, this romantic *fanāʾ* is a breakdown of ego-consciousness and a form of escapism from the terrors of exoteric existence:

Our journey to the shore of destiny ends
 We melt into the air, smiling and rejoicing
 Like melodies.³⁶³

It seems, then, that like al-Bayyātī, ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr realizes that the only deliverance from worldly torment is love, whether human or divine, which is on a par with religious faith. Both poets are, like mystics, romantic at heart. This volume's title poem, *Dreams of the Ancient Knight*, draws a similar conclusion: in it he expresses both the torment of separation, once again in the context of his life journey from youthful innocence to the darkness of adulthood, and his pity for the fate of mankind. *Dearer Than Eyes* conveys the poet's yearning for eternity, nature and resurrection, couched here in romantic terms. Man's romantic fusion is an expression of his mystical fusion into God, whereby duality becomes singularity, or *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

Memoirs of the Sufi Bishr al-Hāfi (1964)

If this romantic vision is optimistic, then ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr soon reminds us in no uncertain terms of the spiritual barrenness of this world. As he says of his poem *Memoirs of the King ʿAjīb bin al-*

³⁶² Ibid, p. 79

³⁶³ Ibid, p. 81

Khaṣīb, “The one harsh truth that the king finds is that man has fallen...”³⁶⁴ This is also the overwhelming message of this dark and melancholy poem: man has fallen and there is scant hope for salvation. The misery portrayed here is the nadir of man’s fall from God. For the first time in ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr’s poems there is an explicitly Sufi – albeit simultaneously very modern – protagonist,³⁶⁵ one who has lost all faith in human progress. Like al-Ḥallāj, he believes in human will and responsibility: man is at fault in God’s eyes, and is being punished accordingly. Bishr’s horror at man’s predicament prompts a lament at the depravity of the modern age, with its loss of certainty and identity. This age is populated by ‘a generation of devils’ perpetuating a dark, Eliotean sterility. What can man do if he gives up on trying to change this wasteland? Bishr’s answer is to turn away from it all, and ‘hang on the rope of [Sufi] silence’. Here even the poet’s desperate faith in the word appears to be deserting him, as speech ‘slips into the sand’:

The word is a stone
 The word is death
 And if you arranged words next to others
 You would produce from them only more words.³⁶⁶

Bishr seems aware here of the endless circularity of language, and its exile from truth. This kindles in him the desire for silence, which, paradoxically, entails truth and death simultaneously. Although ‘a truth remains in the heart, tormenting and consuming it’, he holds out little hope of ever attaining it:

What we find we do not want
 And what we want we do not find.³⁶⁷

This is the paradox of human existence in the exoteric world of language, as post-structuralist theory maintains. Bishr is consumed with disgust for it, but recognises that: ‘if the seas of speech dried out’, then ‘no sailor would unfurl the sail of doubt over its waters’. He therefore wishes to return to a state prior to speech, *fanā’*, which he insists must be God’s punishment for man’s sins:

³⁶⁴ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, *Hayātī*, p. 101

³⁶⁵ Based loosely on the original historical Sufi figure of Bishr al-Ḥāfi (767-840)

³⁶⁶ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, *Ahlām al-Fāris*, p. 118

³⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 121

God Almighty, you bestowed on us this torture
 And suffering
 Because when you saw us we did not shine in your eyes
 God Almighty, this world is diseased, and
 There is no cure.³⁶⁸

Bishr implies unequivocally that truth will only be found within, since the world cannot be perfected. This manifests itself in a yearning for annihilation, for death, characteristic both of Sufis in general and °Abd al-Şabūr's al-Ḥallāj:

If the Compassionate took mercy on us he would hasten us
 Towards death
 God Almighty, this world, nothing
 Can save it
 Where is death, where is death, where
 Is death?³⁶⁹

There is no clearer indication in °Abd al-Şabūr's writing of his desire to abdicate his absurd human responsibility and retreat into his inner self. Bishr sees the people in the market as no more than wild animals engaged in endless and meaningless conflict, squandering God's gift of life. He searches in vain for a genuine human being, a perfect man who will save mankind, concluding that in this diseased world such hopes are absurd, and that man's only choice is to try to save himself from within:

Do you know the time in which we live?
 This diseased day is the eighth day
 Of the fifth week
 Of the thirteenth month
 Man, man has passed
 Years ago

³⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 122

³⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 122

Before I might know him
 He was buried in the gravel, and slept
 Swathed in suffering...³⁷⁰

Night Meditations (1972)

Eight years and two volumes later, °Abd al-Ṣabūr remains in the depths of despair, still terrified by the dark stillness of the night, still comparing himself to a sailor lost at sea. This metaphor, one to which consistently returns, conveys the loss, uncertainty, vulnerability, isolation, fear and helplessness he experiences in his search for personal salvation. Like being lost in the desert, it represents the prolonged journey that the Sufi must undertake before reaching his Beloved:

I set sail alone in the eyes of men, ideas and cities
 I wander alone in deserts of emotions and doubts.³⁷¹

Like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, he exhibits a strong desire to return to the heights and overcome his fallen status, since the lowlands represent 'oblivion' and 'darkness'. However, he is now aware that what he is searching for will remain unspoken inside him and cannot be shared:

Do you want to get to know it, oh spy of time?
 No, I must hide it from you
 For in truth
 I cannot express it to you.³⁷²

The final section appears to symbolise the annihilating process of *fanā'* through the use of poetic form. This *tajrīd*, or abstraction, analogous to the mystic's abstraction of his human characteristics in order to assume the attributes of God, foretells his later poems *Abstractions*. Thus the verse, like the human ego, erodes away into nothingness:

Nothing relieves you... nothing relieves you

³⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 125

³⁷¹ °Abd al-Ṣabūr, *Shajar*, p. 10

³⁷² Ibid, p. 20

Nothing relieves you... nothing relieves

Nothing relieves you... nothing

Nothing relieves you...

Nothing

No...³⁷³

This is also reminiscent of the endless repetition of the *dhikr* ritual in which the Sufi gradually nears the *barzakh* between language and silence until he reaches a state of heightened self-awareness. The poem loses its dimensionality and physical form in a similar way. The *fanā'* expressed here is the negative annihilation of alienation from his self - "I didn't know I was naked / Until now..." – but, ironically, it is this alienation that strips away the veils of his soul and brings him closer to its essence. The modern subject's externally-enforced nakedness therefore aids him in his voluntary internal nakedness before God.

The Search for the Ice Rose (1972)

°Abd al-Ṣabūr's spiritual search continues, despite its apparent futility, in this piece which he overlays with an obscure quote from ibn al-°Arabī referring to the first, or *wārid*, stage of mystical enlightenment in his above-quoted theory of poetic creativity: 'I remained in the state I have classified in this chapter vis-à-vis the divine imports (*wāridāt*), spiritual debasements (*tanazzulāt*), and heavenly harmonies (*munāsabāt*), following our ideal path.' As such, the 'search for the ice rose' can be seen as a metaphor for his quest for God, akin to the ideal path codified by *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*. Fittingly, each verse begins with the word *abḥathu*, 'I search', emphasizing the urgent and devoted nature of this quest. The poet's separation from God, or existential absence, comes across as the root source of his profound sadness:

I search for you in the departing step

Which leads to nothing, to nowhere

The delusion of waiting and presence and absence.³⁷⁴

°Abd al-Ṣabūr couches his strong desire for union in terms borrowed from classical Sufi poetry:

³⁷³ Ibid, p. 21

³⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 27

I see you naked as the stars
 Sleeping scattered
 Longing for union and intimacy
 For a hint of wine and song.³⁷⁵

However, his desire is all the more painful for the elusiveness of its goal, leaving him in total despair, reflecting on a ‘helplessness that pours down like rain on the straw of my wilting, broken soul’. He compares this sense of abandonment to the terrifying wilderness of the desert:

You slip away through the threads of imagination and prayer
 Fading into the light and glass.
 The chair and table turn to dust
 Leaving a dark and empty space
 Like a desert.³⁷⁶

His reference to prayer and use of specific terms – ‘the moment of revelation’ (*tajallī*), ‘disclosure’ (*inkishāf*), ‘union’ (*waṣl*), ‘the ceilings of mosques’, ‘the truth’ (*al-ḥaqīqa*) – render this quest explicitly religious or mystical, and, moreover, fundamentally absurd. For the Sufi may indeed finally glimpse the face of God, but only for the most fleeting of moments. Separation is man’s fate in life. °Abd al-Ṣabūr seems mindful of this strange paradox when he talks of ‘our brief conversation’, and in his final summation:

Our meeting is impossible, cutting as a sword
 But for the blink of an eye...³⁷⁷

This conclusion suggests that he is doomed to live in an imperfect world, prone to the vagaries of evil and misfortune, and although he may toil along the inward path to meet God, only death can truly free him from harm. Human existence for °Abd al-Ṣabūr is therefore inescapably tragic.

³⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 24

³⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 26

³⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 32

In Memory of the Dervish ʿUbāda (1972)

Towards the end of this penultimate volume, *The Trees of the Night*, comes a short, suggestive piece about an obscure dervish whom the poet knew in his youth. The nostalgic description of the descent into adulthood, with the attendant dispersal of friendships, recalls his familiar themes of loss, separation and the distressing effects of time. But the dervish, of whom no word has been heard for many years, seems to live outside time, in a mad and shadowy world:

He used to sit anxiously in frozen fatigue
 Staring at the cloudy horizon
 Until the blood flashed in his eyeball
 Often words were destroyed in his mouth
 When he spoke
 Until they became terrified screams, like the wind,
 Drops of water from a bottle
 Or jumbled, unfathomable voices.³⁷⁸

The pregnant tension between inner and outer dimensions in the dervish's muted words, which resemble the incoherent eruptions of a psychotic or a drunkard, clearly recalls the parallel between mysticism and madness noted in the introduction, a classic theme in Sufi writing. As the Sufi becomes closer to union with God, he moves beyond the domain of rational and linguistic demarcation. As Chittick states, 'Naming brings about a certain distance, differentiation, and sobriety... [it] pertains to separation and multiplicity... In contrast, the uncreated and undifferentiated realm represents a kind of drunkenness.'³⁷⁹ With this drunkenness, however, comes supposedly a visionary clarity, in contrast to the strange darkness that results from intellectual endeavours. It is this clarity, achieved through mystical discipline and only distorted when the dervish attempts to externalize it, which the poet can somehow sense, if not rationalize:

Sometimes I wonder
 Could he see something we couldn't?
 Did he know something we didn't?

³⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 104-5

³⁷⁹ Chittick, *Sufism*, pp. 38-9

Could he sense the wild horses of time
Advancing behind our steps?³⁸⁰

Although the protagonist and the dervish cannot communicate normally, since they inhabit separate psychic domains, a trace of understanding persists. °Abd al-Şabūr hints that the dervish can foresee the social troubles ahead – such as the struggles between powerbrokers and religious radicals, both of whom have a flawed claim on truth – even if he is powerless to solve them. This is the disturbing irony of mysticism for the modern poet: the visionary Sufi, like al-Ḥallāj, understands the world all too well, but remains impotent in the teeth of political reality.

Abstractions (1979)

This is one of °Abd al-Şabūr's most important poems and the definitive exposition of his existential predicament. As previously, he explicitly refers to what has become a highly developed sensitivity towards Sufism through the use of specific terms, such as *tajrīdāt* itself, which denotes the stripping away of false selfhood on the path of purification. The poem describes the special, unpredictable state reached through these abstractions, his experience of which bears analogy to the Sufi in *fanā'* in that it entails 'the bliss of sleep', 'a serene assurance', where 'I became air / dissolving into erasure'; in other words, the existential release of reaching union with God. This state is an ethereal, almost out-of-body experience whereby he becomes the object of divine love rather than the subject of human will:

In it I heard no echoes;
The echoes heard me,
I did not touch anything;
Things touched me.³⁸¹

However, this state now eludes him and, frustrated, he is left to contemplate how to establish real meaning in life. This leads to a clean break from the mystical allusions of the first part to the practical exploration of the paradoxes of human existence and the consequent choices:

³⁸⁰ °Abd al-Şabūr, *Şahar*, p. 105

³⁸¹ °Abd al-Şabūr, *al-Ibhār*, p. 81

The sword of futility
 Falls between desire and reason.
 The desert of inactivity
 Stretches between desire and value.
 What can the terrified mouse do
 Between the sword and the desert?³⁸²

All his actions, whether their inspiration be esoteric (desire) or exoteric (reason), fall inevitably under ‘the sword of futility’, and thus have no meaningful consequence, causing him to question the purpose or even necessity of human action. To achieve anything of value involves crossing ‘the desert of inactivity’, a seemingly impossible task. This leaves the human being in an utterly absurd position, stranded not just between action and inaction but also between desire and failure to fulfil that desire. ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr posits the mouse in this terrible catch-22, which renders his body unbearably heavy, since he believes that ‘artists and mice are the two most sensitive creatures towards danger.’³⁸³ Deprived of his former bliss, the poet/mouse can see three equally desperate solutions:

First hypothesis:
 Flee from the sword of futility to useless activity.
 Second hypothesis:
 Flee from the desert of inactivity to the depths of undesire
 Only to be cut down by the sword of futility.
 Third Hypothesis:
 Retreat down the hole of futility,
 Undesire,
 And inactivity...
 And die!³⁸⁴

‘Abd al-Ṣabūr sees the first option, to ignore the meaninglessness of one’s actions, as nothing but a vicious circle, a Sisyphean stone. The second option, similarly, is an absurd stand in the face of

³⁸² Ibid, p. 83

³⁸³ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī*, p. 54

³⁸⁴ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, *al-Ibhār*, p. 83-4

the human condition resulting only in defeat and death. In his existential predicament both action and inaction are ultimately futile. Thus he is left to choose between an absurd life and a miserable death, the third option. The only hope is to make this death somehow meaningful, as al-Ḥallāj did. This provides a further logic to ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr’s preoccupation with mysticism, the path of ‘death in life’, which is clearly implied in the final part:

Oh Lord! Oh Lord!
 So much have you let me drink
 That your cup has entered the home of my secrets
 You have compelled me to silence,
 And here I am, choking,
 Strangled by my secrets.³⁸⁵

Like the dervish ʿUbāda, he is strangled by divine ‘secrets’: he may yet see the Truth, but will never be able to exotericize it into dynamic, meaningful action. ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr finds himself paralysed between the bliss of truth and the agony of its limits. Man can only change himself from within, and is thus ‘compelled to silence’.

This poem, written shortly before ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr’s death, is a succinct and definitive expression of his final psychic position. Again, form is used to elucidate meaning: the three sections reflect the three distinct phases of his inner life, passing cyclically from faith to doubt and back to faith. His final faith, however, is certainly very different from his original, naïve faith: it is the last resort of a man who is stricken by Kierkegaardian despair, and who is honest enough to confront it. Like the Danish philosopher, he sees man’s irrational relationship with God as the ultimate principle in life, rather than the ideal of rationalism that he so clearly rejects here.

Death In Between (1979)

ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr perhaps differs from Kierkegaard, however, in the immanence of his internal god, in contrast to the latter’s distinction between God and man. In this final poetic dialogue, he parodies the Qur’anic God by quoting him and arguing passionately against him.

³⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 85

The dialogue between the ‘weak voice’ (man) and the ‘great voice’ (God) opens with the latter proclaiming – despite the poet’s religious despair and the spiritual sterility of the age – that He has not forsaken mankind. The speech is lifted directly from Qur’ān 93:1-5:

By the morning brightness
 And the stillness of the night
 Your Lord has not abandoned you, nor does He abhor you
 The last is better for you than the first
 Your Lord will provide for you and you will be content.³⁸⁶

Clearly, this Sura is highlighted for ironic value in the context of a dismal post-1967 Arab reality. ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr returns to an important theme here: since his youth the poet has believed that the afterlife is a dangerous delusion and that man must strive to perfect himself *before* death intervenes. The tragedy of Arab defeat is an inevitable result of the persistence of blind faith. The weak, human voice therefore begins to ask God some searching questions:

Where?
 Where are your gifts, oh Lord of existence?
 Here I am, stumbling between two doors
 Falling into purgatory...
 The burning spears of alienation in the heart, oh my scorched eyes
 I writhe in vexation, my Lord
 And each morning I receive the poison-tipped dagger of my listlessness
 In my chest.³⁸⁷

The poet sums up his disillusion with the human condition through this idea of a constant purgatory. Consciousness is torment, and unconsciousness respite. While sleep may offer some relief, only death provides the ultimate liberation. Since it is this same psychological need that inspires the Sufi to sacrifice his individual consciousness for the sake of the all-embracing consciousness, the poet can describe his vision of annihilation in Sufi terms:

³⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 43

³⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 43-4

My stay goes on...

Until I imagine that I have fallen into utter oblivion

And your luminous force annihilates me

I don't speak about it, my Lord: it is a secret sealed between two hearts.³⁸⁸

Here again is the longing to return to God – in existential terms, death – which runs throughout his work. Death may be an escape from a tortuous existence, but only into sheer nothingness. Surely the 'death in life' of *fanā'*, would therefore be preferable. But by this stage in his life, °Abd al-Şabūr has surrendered to extreme pessimism and seems unable to achieve it. Whenever he feels God's presence it disappears like al-Bayyātī's °Ā'isha, leaving him distraught:

You came close, and gave

Until you moistened my lips

With the blessed water of Paradise

And sowed sweet basil on my shoulders

Then you withdrew.³⁸⁹

God's voice resumes with the famous Qur'anic passage (2:30-32) in which He teaches Adam the names of everything in the world. Here °Abd al-Şabūr returns to the theme of man's fall from Paradise, a powerful metaphor for his life. By incorporating Qur'anic passages into his dialogue, °Abd al-Şabūr undermines the sacred cornerstone of classical Islamic belief in the Qur'ān as the uncreated and eternal word of God, highlighting instead its status as a historical document closely related to poetry. In His original act of naming things for all time, God exiles them from truth, just as language remains outside the *mandala*. °Abd al-Şabūr bitterly satirises this divine act:

He taught Adam all the names

Then he showed them to the angels and said: "Tell me

These names, if you are truthful."

They said: "Almighty, we know only that which you have taught us

You are the knowledgeable and the wise."

³⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 44

³⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 43-4

He said: "Adam, tell them their names..."³⁹⁰

The weak voice responds by rejecting the very idea of naming, and of life in God's shadow:

Turn your commandment away from me, oh Giver of blessings

Chose another vessel for your magnanimity

As for long now, since the sun of your eyes abandoned me,

I have become accustomed to the crafty shadow.³⁹¹

This is the state which the poet calls 'living... and not living', that is, the negative 'death in life'. Behind this lie three fundamental questions, the answers to which, as he states in his autobiography, he has always searched:

What is the purpose of life?

What is the purpose of love?

What is the purpose of art?³⁹²

When answers elude him, it is tempting to take an ironic pleasure in his defeat and reconcile himself to 'the crafty shadow'. What can a man in total, irrevocable despair do but take perverse pride in it? Failure to find a meaning in life elicits his exasperation with this exoteric God:

What do you want from me, oh Lord?

Do you want me to call evil by its name?³⁹³

But by now, as seen earlier, 'Abd al-Ṣabūr is unable to undertake any meaningful action. He seems so terrified of the vulnerability of human existence that he craves his lost security, even if this means disappearing altogether. Thus he literally wishes the earth would swallow him up. The final speech turns to the only other solution besides sleep and death, namely love, the substitute for divine union. Paradoxically, then, the escapism of romantic love becomes the final conclusion of a deeply committed life:

³⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 45

³⁹¹ Ibid, p. 46

³⁹² 'Abd al-Ṣabūr, *Hayātī*, p. 52

³⁹³ 'Abd al-Ṣabūr, *al-Ibhār*, p. 46

Cover me... cover me!
 Stand by me...
 Take me between your breasts, embrace me, for the divine voice
 Cannot find a way to my ears or eyes
 Become an earth
 Break open a cave for me in your dark soil
 And swallow me...³⁹⁴

°Abd al-Şabūr stumbles through an Arab postmodernity in which man is utterly disillusioned and spiritually fragmented. The theme of the return to nature, or mystical union with the earth, reveals both an escapist and an ecological dimension to his neo-Sufi quest of *fanā'*:

Become water
 And spread out a ship from your forearms
 Carry me to where the cloud and darkness sleep
 Or turn into a bottle
 In which I dissolve into wind and smoke
 When you lower your flowing hair as a veil, a cover, a shelter
 Protect me, hide me, take me from God
 Cover me... cover me!
 Stand by me...
 Don't desert me; my certitude is lost.³⁹⁵

Thus °Abd al-Şabūr ends with a complete rejection of the exoteric deity and an overwhelming desire for the esoteric, staying true to his observation that man cannot escape the idea of God. As with al-Bayyātī, the last resort for one who has lost faith in everything is to dissolve into the cocoon of human love.

³⁹⁴ Ibid, pp. 47-8

³⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 48

Conclusion

With his mystical theory of creativity, his blend of esoterism, existentialism and egalitarianism, and what developed finally into an Eastern brand of postmodernism, Ṣalāḥ °Abd al-Ṣabūr made a unique contribution to modern Arab thought. His considerable erudition only increased his perplexity and encouraged him to seek an otherworldly source of salvation. In his defining work, *The Tragedy of al-Ḥallāj*, he expresses his belief that individuals can only transform themselves from within, thereby uncovering the totalising and distorting discourses that control their lives.

This chapter has demonstrated the circularity of °Abd al-Ṣabūr's psychological life, ending with the third and final stage, the vision of the return to the esoteric, in which the principle of Sufi *tawakkul* and the Kierkegaardian primacy of faith are paramount. The identification with *tawakkul* – the idea that man's ultimate goal is to become utterly dependent on God – has inevitably morbid connotations that link it to existentialist thought, such as the notion that man is only safe from harm before birth and after death. Although the conscientious °Abd al-Ṣabūr found this view morally distasteful, his despair clearly increased its allure. Such was his desire to return to his original organic state that he openly discussed suicide, foretelling his early death.

Like Western postmodernists, °Abd al-Ṣabūr, while thinking beyond a broadly Marxist paradigm, had lost hope in the public functions of reason inspired by the European Enlightenment, was sceptical of political grand narratives (such as “pan-Arabism”), and had a deeply ambiguous relationship with the language, the tool of his trade. His works reveal a profound concern with the important postmodernist ethical debate concerning the relationship between discourse and power: only God, not the exclusive and exploitative political system, could ultimately judge al-Ḥallāj. Individual human subjectivity and the call to universal values, as exemplified by the latter, exposed the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of the dominant ideology of the 1960s.

However, the incompatibility of such postmodernist attitudes to a commitment to any settled philosophical question created great psychological difficulties for °Abd al-Ṣabūr, leaving him paddling helplessly in a kind of moral ethereality. His play showed that effective political action requires more than mere disillusionment with reality: the modern subject must reach both *fanā'* and *baqā'*. How can one return meaningfully from this postmodern *fanā'* and justify any

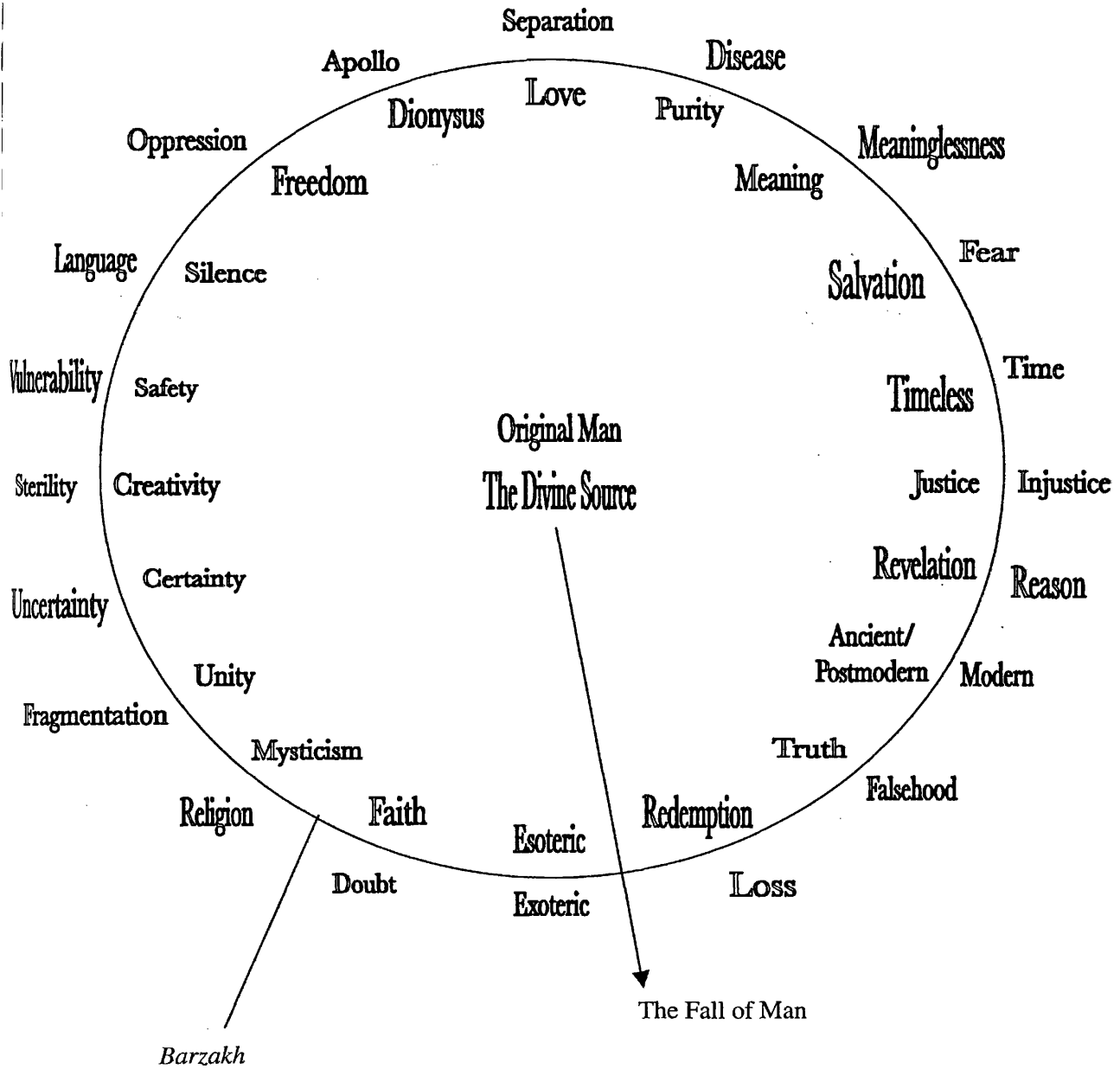
programme for action to improve the world? How can disinterested justice be done? What can fill the moral and spiritual void of an age lacking faith in either reason or revolution? Paradoxically, the dynamic return to the world – for him, the ultimate objective of Sufism – seems doomed to failure. To be a complete moral agent or individually perfect self, *al-insān al-kāmil*, by this definition, is impossible, since the collectively perfect self cannot exist. This precipitates °Abd al-Şabūr’s increasing withdrawal, summed up in his late poem *Abstractions* and in his other pessimistic speculations on death like *Death in Between* and *Memoirs of the Sufi Bishr al-Ḥāfi*. Ultimately, however, the resort to God for relief and restored psychic wholeness proves illusory, since his faith has been irrevocably shattered. Despite his considerable alienation, this modern poet is too worldly and consumed by doubt to be able to reinvent tradition.

°Abd al-Şabūr’s Eastern postmodernism, then, much inspired by Nietzsche and critical of Marx, seems no less pessimistic and morbid than much of its Western counterpart, and no more a programme for effective action. Is the esoteric anything more than an existential black hole that deconstructs the socially constructed ‘subject’? What choice is there but to enter this black hole, thereby losing all active selfhood, or to remain in the exoteric world as merely a false, incomplete self, utterly contingent on the surrounding social and cultural forces?

Man’s fall from Paradise is the premise of Sufism. Like the Sufi, °Abd al-Şabūr attempts to overcome this predicament, which accounts for his conspicuous mystical inclinations. As such, his existential outlook can also be illustrated with the *mandala* diagram (see over), which posits the exoteric values – man’s fallen status – and esoteric values – his mystical goal – in simultaneous opposition and complementarity. In searching for *baqā*’, the poet seeks to unify these apparent dualities and thus testify to the oneness of God/Self.

°Abd al-Şabūr’s attempt to bridge the Sufi *barzakh* between esoteric and exoteric realities is evidently a lonely and bewildering journey. His neo-Sufi project of *baqā*’ remains forever incomplete, leaving him in the selfless passivity of *fanā*’. This perhaps accounts for his many images, so common in Sufism, of being lost in the divine sea: the blissful freedom of being thrown open and destroyed. In its endlessly oscillating desire for the danger of the sea and the safety of the shore, the poet’s character is revealed as irrevocably lacking in psychological unity.

Human Existence According to Ṣalāh ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr



CHAPTER 4: ADONIS: TOTAL ESOTERIC REVOLUTION

“Wherever you turn, there is the face of God” – Qur’ān 2:115

“Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth” – Pablo Picasso.

“Things keep their secrets” – Heraclitus³⁹⁶

“The ‘*ālim* is in slavery... the *wāqif* is free” – al-Niffarī³⁹⁷

This chapter will show the continuities and dissonances between the different stages of Adonis’ (b. 1930) intellectual life and demonstrate the role that Sufism plays within his vision of existence. Given that analysis of the mystical element in his work necessitates an appreciation of the overall philosophical outlook of which it is part, this will involve examination of his early religious and ideological influences, his engagement with the cultural other and his critique of Arabic culture, as well as his theoretical studies pertaining specifically to Sufism. The initial hypothesis is that his mysticism both forms as an intellectual standpoint in its own right and a key component of his broader cultural perspective, from the specific to the universal level. The principal difficulty here is that the mystical elements appear to be embedded within not just the content, but the very ‘genetic code’ of his writing. Esoteric principles function primarily at the deeper level in a unified hybrid of form and content rather than superficially, a factor accentuated by his calculated ambiguity and obscurity. Adonis’ poetic writing is therefore comparatively unsuited to ‘proof-texting’, i.e. demonstrating the strength of a critical observation through direct quoting. This emphasis on inner or deep structure rather than outward statement necessitates a slightly different approach. I will therefore examine each of the various aspects of Adonisian thought in turn as a prelude to analysis of a late work from his voluminous oeuvre.

³⁹⁶ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, tr. Brooks Haxton, (Penguin, London, 2001), p. 9

³⁹⁷ Al-Niffarī, *The Mawāqif and Maukhāṭabāt of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdī ‘l-Jabbār al-Niffarī*, ed A. J. Arberry, (E.J.W.Gibb Memorial Trust, Cambridge, 1935), p. 15

°Alawism and Esoteric Thought

While Adonis' attitude towards the structure of Arab-Islamic civilization – essentially that radical change is essential to its meaningful continuation on the global stage – is well known, there has yet to be a full investigation into its theoretical genealogy. Our starting point, therefore, is his own religio-cultural background, ostensibly the root of his distinctive *Weltanschauung*. In this light there stands a marked dichotomy between the highly esoteric doctrines of °Alawism and the exoteric institution of Sunnism, revealing a schism that coheres with Adonis' attack on Islamic orthodoxy and thence ideological thinking in general.

Adonis was born and bred in the mountainous °Alawī region of northwest Syria. The °Alawī religion's problematic relationship with Sunni Islam seems as much documented as the religion itself.³⁹⁸ Although prominent °Alawīs insist they are legitimate Muslims for explicable reasons of political expediency, neutral observers tend to classify them as a subsidiary Shī'ī sect. Analysis of the available literature on °Alawism reveals that its doctrinal relation to Sunnism is at most highly tangential, and often outright opposed. The two traditions have radically different worldviews. °Alawism is regarded as syncretistic and heterodox in constitution, possibly incorporating various ancient cults such as Phoenician paganism, which is noted for veneration of natural phenomena (such as trees, wind, sacred springs, high places, stars and celestial bodies and so on, all prominent in Adonis' poetry), Mazdakian dualism, Christian trinitarianism, 'as well as Persian... and Muslim – both Sunnī and Shī'ī – religious precepts and practices'.³⁹⁹ The Qur'ān is reputedly of secondary importance, and even then interpreted figuratively rather than literally. Such heterodoxy stands in marked contrast to the relatively rigid structures of historical Sunni Islam, which values "orthopraxy" and liturgical unity. Essentially, °Alawism is an esoteric creed whose cosmological underpinnings correspond closely to Sufism. In these cognate traditions, orthodox practice (*sharī'a*) is viewed as but the first stage towards truth (*ḥaqīqa*), reached through a long path of discipline (*ṭarīqa*).⁴⁰⁰ These factors lead to ritual diversity and eschewal of

³⁹⁸ It should be noted here that difficulties persist in discussing the Alawis in general terms for two main reasons: their secrecy and heterodoxy.

³⁹⁹ Meir M. Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, *The Nusayri-'Alawi Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy*, (Brill, Leiden, 2002), p. 1

⁴⁰⁰ For example, the °Alawī tradition in Turkey views the eponym of the Sufi Bektashi order as one of their main spiritual ancestors. See for this David Shankland, *The Alevis in Turkey: The Emergence of a Secular Islamic Tradition* (Routledge, London, 2003)

central authority, in contrast to the Sunni ideal. There are also similarities vis-à-vis social hierarchy and spiritual structure, as both feature mediating holy men and the idea of transcendent spiritual faculties (i.e. *baraka*). Significantly, one observer has described °Alawism more in terms of a *culture* than a religion.⁴⁰¹ Its allegorical and antinomian tendencies, the preference for internal meaning over external action, the belief in transmigration (*tanāsukh*) and incarnation (*hulūl*, particularly with regard to °Alī), and its emphasis on divine immanence, all link it clearly to Sufism. Conversely, exoteric or legalistic Sunnism regards incarnation and transmigration as heresies. °Alawism also purportedly rejects a central tenet of Islamic eschatology, namely the Last Judgement and resurrection of the dead, which would account for a very different conception of key philosophical categories such as time, causality and teleology (circular rather than linear), which are far more consonant with Adonis' existential outlook. Finally, °Alawism's heterodoxy breaches the insistence on the utter singularity and unknowability of God embodied in standard Islamic monotheism. The influential Ḥanbalī jurist ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) considered °Alawīs mere idolaters and authorized *jihād* against them.⁴⁰²

°Alawism, then, differs from Sunnism not only politically, by virtue of its status as an extreme Shī'ī sect, but also philosophically. The inference follows that its role in Adonis' intellectual constitution, and his stringent criticisms of Arab-Islamic order, has been seminal. Some later poetry, discussed below, hints at this link between cultural background and his worldview.

The correspondence between pre-modern °Alawī culture and the European postmodern values embraced by Adonis merits discussion here. °Alawism's eclectic nature is consistent with the notions of pluralism and relativism, while its distrust of central authority and antinomian instincts contain the seeds of political liberalism and cultural change, values that Adonis has vociferously supported. Positively describing an 'alternative path to modernisation within Islam', Shankland charts how the Turkish °Alawī (or Alevi) community, with its fundamental principle of political secularism, has adapted relatively easily to the modern world.⁴⁰³ While Sunnīs may conflate Islam with state, he argues, Alevis are more able to distinguish between a religio-cultural affiliation to *Alevilik* (°Alawism) and a political affiliation to the state. This is consistent with

⁴⁰¹ Shankland, op.cit., p. 153

⁴⁰² H. Halm, 'Nuṣayriyya', *EI*, vol. 8, p. 147

⁴⁰³ The real question is, however, whether this modernisation is 'within Islam' or not.

Adonis' interpretation of the lack of freedom in many Islamic societies to a failure to differentiate between religion and state: 'Islam unites words and actions. Hence its political tendency.'⁴⁰⁴ Particularly interesting is Shankland's observation of 'the way the Alevi creed takes one aspect of Islamic mysticism [*edep*, the believer's goal of reaching the God within] and relates this explicitly to the social order: they say that God can only be reached if all are at peace within the community, that God is reached by doing another a kindness with no expectation of return, for then we enter into our hearts, the true Mecca, where God lies.'⁴⁰⁵ As with Sufi *baqā'*, then, both individual and collective perfection are the product of the inner path. Shankland describes Alevi social organisation as the collective attempt to externalise the individual's internal balance. Moreover, the references both to God's immanence within the human heart, rather than status as transcendent judge, and to the esoteric idea of the internal Ḥajj, are unambiguous here. These remove the definitive separation between man and God that defines the exoteric perspective, and restore man to his active role as participant rather than passenger in the divine order. The 'highly sophisticated' Alevi theology, Shankland asserts, which contains 'complementary but different religious perceptions of the deity... presents God as being both immanent and transcendent at the same time. The internalised conception of God, as being a part of all people, both men and women, is stressed in many ways: it is said, for instance, that the point of worship together is to see into one another's faces, and thereby into the heart, where the true God lies.'⁴⁰⁶ This simultaneity principle, or what we might call 'suspension of the logical', a central motif in Adonis' thought, recalls the Sufi *insān kāmil* as the embodiment of a perfect synthesis of esoteric and exoteric realities.

Culturally, then, °Alawism's clear detachment from the Qur'anic, legislative, institutional forms of belief has arguably engendered a more localised, secular and pluralist sense of citizenship. The importance of °Alī (*al-ma'nā*) and Salmān al-Fārisī (*al-bāb*) in °Alawism also suggests a spiritual inclination towards the heterodox, mountainous Persian Shī'ism and Sufism to which it is historically connected, rather than the more austere Sunnism of the Arabian desert and urban centres.

⁴⁰⁴ Adonis, *The Pages of Day and Night*, tr. S. Hazo (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1994), p. 102

⁴⁰⁵ Shankland, *op.cit.*, p. 8

⁴⁰⁶ Shankland, *op.cit.*, p. 113

Describing it as a ‘universal peaceful mysticism’, Shankland concludes that ‘this way of life is made coherent within the Islamic tradition by having recourse to the great body of esoteric lore present in Islamic mystical ideas.’ Since the teachings of the Alevi *Tarikat* are fully intertwined in the everyday life and outlook of every Alevi individual, both a mystical, esoteric interpretation of religious rules, an interpretation at once hierarchical and internalised, therefore become ‘dispersed throughout the community, available to all its members, both men and women, by virtue of their birth into an Alevi community... In their wholesale embrace of a secular outlook, the heterodox Alevis... really do appear to be different in some qualitative way from orthodox communities.’⁴⁰⁷ An Alevi man interviewed by Shankland quoted ibn al-‘Arabī: ‘An idolater’s worship is not [directed] to the idol, but to the light of God that is reflected through the idol.’⁴⁰⁸ Herein lies Shankland’s ‘qualitative’ difference: for the esoterist, God is manifest *in the world*, present in everything, exposing him to charges of polytheism, or *shirk*; for the exoterist, He is essentially absent.

It has been demonstrated beyond doubt that ‘Alawism and Sufism – Adonis’ cultural background and intellectual inspiration – are profoundly intertwined on a historical, philosophical and ethical level in contradiction to exoteric monotheism. Adonis’ neo-Sufi inclinations can therefore be legitimately viewed as, *inter alia*, a return to ‘Alawī principles that he internalised in his formative years. The dichotomy between esoteric and exoteric worldviews informs all consequent intellectual, political and ethical standpoints. Adonis’ ‘Alawī background, with its inherent heterodoxy and localisation, is easily reconcilable with his mystical humanism, and probably contributed significantly to its formation.

Further, ‘Alawism’s status as a distinct religion has a distinct bearing on Adonis’ cultural mission and critique of Arab-Islamic civilization. His endless struggle with the relationship between language and Arab existence should be seen in the context of his status, by birth and subsequently by choice, as the civilizational outsider *par excellence*. Speaking and writing in a holy language while remaining marginal to its religious tradition, he seems torn between his love

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 179-80.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 24

for the language and his spiritual exile from it.⁴⁰⁹ However, his project remains ostensibly an attempt at cultural revival rather than rejection.

⁴⁰⁹ See Adonis, *Pages*, pp. 101-8. He himself implies that marginality is a notable feature of many radical thinkers such as Ibn al-ʿArabī, a Muslim from Spain.

The SSNP, °Alawism and Sufism

It is well known that for much of his early adulthood Adonis was a full and active member of the fascistic Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP), under whose ideological banner his critique of the prevailing reality began. Anṭūn Sa°āda (1904-49), SSNP founder and ‘originator of a renaissance the like of which may not be found in the entire Near East’⁴¹⁰, was the foremost intellectual influence on the young poet.⁴¹¹ Like a *mahdī* or a hidden *imām* (an impression only reinforced by his subsequent ‘martyrdom’), Sa°āda, who exuded all the charisma of a revolutionary religious leader, spent most of his leadership in exile, waiting for the triumphant return. His political organisation purported to espouse an altogether new and radical outlook on human existence in Syria, in which secularism itself became an article of faith. Aiming at a total transformation of society, Sa°āda maintained that, “literature and art will not change unless there exists a new philosophical attitude toward the big questions of life and the universe...”⁴¹² Adonis’ involvement with a consciously anti-Islamic movement and subsequent re-espousal of the Arab-Islamic cause clearly merits further investigation.

Sa°āda attempted to radically redefine his human environment, claiming that the party’s mission was to ‘regenerate the Syrian nation and make it possible for Syria to become a modern, viable political community.’⁴¹³ The inertia of traditionalism should not obstruct the advancement of the nation. It was this rejection of the *status quo* and direct call for change that encouraged many young intellectuals to support the SSNP’s almost wholesale identification with Western modernity. The party utterly rejected the Islamic worldview and the notion of transcendental God in favour of a modern, scientific standpoint, heavily influenced by Darwin and Nietzsche. It held the historicist, relativist view that religion is but a function of the human mind. Its first reform principle was separation of religion and state, which it maintained was a vital underpinning of any modern society. It seems the SSNP’s alluringly destructive energy contributed to a distinct

⁴¹⁰ Kamal Jumblatt, quoted in Labib Zuwiyya Yamak, *The Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party: An Ideological Analysis* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1966), p. 139

⁴¹¹ Apparently eager to underplay his SSNP allegiance, Adonis would later deny that Sa°āda had given him his penname, but given his ideological commitment at the time it seems more likely that this was indeed the case. However, it was the SSNP’s preoccupation with change and modernization that appeared to have appealed most, rather than its fascistic structure.

⁴¹² Joseph Zeidan, ‘Myth and Symbol in the Poetry of Adonis and Yusuf al-Khal’, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 10 (1975), p. 73

⁴¹³ Yamak, op.cit, p. 89

stage in the development of the mature Adonisian worldview. Even long after his break with them, Adonis would agree with Sa[°]āda's (albeit hypocritical) belief that "in the political system where there is no separation between church and state, government is always on behalf of God, not the people". What would replace divine authority was another question.

Adonis' youthful experiment with the SSNP can be interpreted as a stage in the development of his later esoteric viewpoint, rather than an aberration. "Every nation", Sa[°]āda argued, "which seeks a free and independent life through which it can achieve its noble ideals must possess real spiritual unity."⁴¹⁴ Later, Adonis would maintain this notion of spiritual unity whilst rejecting that of the national boundary: 'In a first step to remove frontiers between me and my self within me I began to see the word frontier not as a wall or an end but rather, as a window and a beginning of another path, another knowledge, another search, and another affiliation.'⁴¹⁵ That progress depends on transcending traditional foci of allegiance is an idea common to both Syrian nationalism and neo-Sufism, the latter merely taking the process a step further. As such, SSNPism fulfilled the function of second, ideological stage in Adonis' psychological development, with the third lying implicit within it.

Yamak claims it is no exaggeration to say that Sa[°]āda saw himself as a superhuman political revolutionary who founded a new religious movement. This harked back, whether deliberately or not, to the Muḥammadan paradigm. Structurally, the SSNP was comparable to the hierarchical formation of a Sufi *ṭarīqa* with a divinely inspired leader. "The world has witnessed many religions descend from heaven," Sa[°]āda declared, "but today it is witnessing a new religion emanating from this land to lift the souls... to heaven". Yamak asserts that Sa[°]āda actually believed that his message 'constituted not only a new religion for Syria but the only valid outlook on life.'⁴¹⁶ However, whilst radically new, it merely manifested the age-old, cyclical human instinct for regeneration. Conceptually, it is not a quantum leap from this earthy nationalist revolution to the cosmic, eternal revolution of mysticism.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, p. 95

⁴¹⁵ Adonis, 'Beyond East/West: Towards a Culture of the Future', lecture delivered at Dartmouth College, 09.05.2001.

⁴¹⁶ Yamak, op.cit, p. 98

Just as pre-Islamic Arabia had been the time of *jāhiliyya*, contemporary life in Syria was, for Sa[‘]āda, characterised by ‘chaos, darkness and decline’, The SSNP purported to offer the individual a new identity, obeying a higher self in “*an unbreakable union* based on belief in the ideology of social nationalism, complete faith in the doctrine of the party and continual devotion to the movement.”⁴¹⁷ This mystical vision bears notable similarities to modern reformist visions of the original Muḥammadan *umma*, in which any contradiction of the sacred text is seen as apostasy against its infallible Word.

In referring to himself as “the teacher and guide of the nation and mankind,” Sa[‘]āda ‘all but proclaimed himself a prophet.’⁴¹⁸ Some of his more fanatic followers even ascribed divine powers to him, as if he were a Sufi *ṣāhib al-karāmāt* or *insān kāmil*. ““The party”, declare its apologists, “is the nation in microcosm. It is man-society at his best as represented in this magnificent unity of institutions which constitute one whole administrative body, one perfect Man.”⁴¹⁹ The iconic image of Sa[‘]āda as the revolutionary man of vision, the redeemer sent to guide men to truth, must have been intoxicating for young, impressionable intellectuals and recent migrants to the cities. Adonis’ desire for a new prophet to wipe away the debris of the past is explicit in much early poetry. Sa[‘]āda’s Zarathustra-esque posturing doubtless informed to some extent the creation of Adonis’ ‘heathen saint’, the prophetic⁴²⁰ Miḥyār.

Yamak views Sa[‘]āda according to the Weberian typology of charismatic leadership in which God is transformed into a focal point of the ideology in question and axis of collective identification. Adonis’ neo-Sufi esoterisation of the transcendent Islamic God can be seen as a philosophical extension of this phenomenon. The SSNP defined its leadership ‘in “religious” terms as being apostolic – a *qiyāda rasūliyya*’, or prophetic leadership. Since the charismatic leader’s authority is internal, or esoteric, ‘it follows that he owes allegiance to no one’⁴²¹, neither the temporal government nor the inherited religious edifice. Sa[‘]āda’s sense of prophetic mission strongly resembles the mystical doctrine of the *quṭb*, or axis, prominent in Sufi thought, although it is not directly derived from it. SSNP ideology posited him as an eternal axis around which the party

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, p. 114

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, p. 107

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, p. 115

⁴²⁰ “Prophetic” here is used in the original sense of being sent to reveal a divine mission, rather than the common sense of being endowed with clairvoyant capabilities.

⁴²¹ Yamak, op.cit. p.119

members revolve, like *murīds* in a Sufi *ṭarīqa*. As discussed later, the *qutb*'s power, according to Sufi doctrine, is comparable to that of the prophet. Corbin deems the *qutb* a Shī'ī idea later adapted back into Sunni mysticism (although the exoteric authorities firmly reject the idea of saintly hierarchy), correlating with the Shī'ī *imām* as ultimate spiritual and temporal authority. Charismatic religious figures in Sufi / Islamic history, such as Aḥmed Sirhindī, have ascribed *qutbiyya* to themselves. Sa'āda's supposed infallibility was essentially no different.

Both in its hierarchical structure and otherwise, the SSNP resembled a Sufi *ṭarīqa*: the party constitution strongly resembles a *murīd*'s pledge of absolute devotion to the infallible authority of a *sheikh*. The party initially practised a form of *taqiyya*, dissimulation, a practice common to Sufi orders and Shī'ī sects. The adaptability of the *ṭarīqa* structure from spiritual family to political party to confront an external threat is well attested. The SSNP's quasi-mystical preoccupation with regeneration and the earth – celebrated in Adonis' early poem *The Earth Spoke* – implies a pagan or pantheistic conflation of nature and God. This “earthly religion” saw itself as constituted in the organic continuity between the land and people of Syria since time immemorial, and explicitly prior to Islam. The earth is therefore a salient feature both of Adonis' ideological and post-ideological phases, the latter also representing a return to his rustic 'Alawī roots.

As seen previously, neo-Sufism has been accompanied by forays into ancient history and mythology in order to emphasize the plurality of both the poet's identity and his spiritual heritage. The motif of regeneration is prominent here. The Tammuzic fertility myth used by Adonis during the 1950s bears a clear structural analogy to the Sufi dialectic of *fanā'* and *baqā'*: both conceive of death as prelude to a new birth. The SSNP, too, proclaimed the death of the present Arab civilization in anticipation of a great new era. In this regeneration dialectic, Adonis' neo-Sufi phase would form a continuity with his ideological phase.

The rejection of the finality of Muḥammad's prophecy and with it orthodox Islamic belief and practice, implicit in 'Alawism and SSNPism, is central to Adonis' argument that knowledge can never be complete. He views his own poetry as ‘a questioning of the truth of any discourse whatsoever, be it human or divine. It presents a text that is open and unfinished, the opposite of

the sealed eternal text of [institutional] religion'.⁴²² Man's religious inclination should be open and future-oriented, rather than tied eternally to a specific historical moment, which leads to what Adonis calls 'pastism'. 'Alawism, unlike Sunnism, appears to conceive of the religious tradition as rooted in successive layers of esoteric leadership, rather than an uncreated, utterly immutable book recorded once and for all time. It is debatable whether Adonis' project is a revolution within Islamic civilization or an altogether new undertaking.

Like the 'Alawī and Sufi *ṭarīqas*, the SSNP, initially a secret society (for fear of persecution), exhibited a concentric initiatory structure revolving around an 'immaculate' central axis, or *quṭb*, that is synonymous with absolute truth. All three were formative influences on the young poet. Although in Sufism the *quṭb*'s integrity is supposedly guaranteed by his spiritual discipline, in a secular context this can descend into autocracy. Ignoring crucial aspects of identity such as language, religion and history, the SSNP's self-serving totalitarian ideology saw society as the primary existential unit. The sharp boundaries that it drew implied qualitative differences among mankind, rather than merely exterior differences within a human continuum. It therefore merely offered one totalising belief for another. Its nationalism remained a form without content, unable to transform Syrian society into a self-sufficient political community. With his empirical belief in freedom, Adonis' rejection of the SSNP was inevitable. Yet despite its failings, the party's emergence raised a fundamental question that remained at the heart of his critique: 'How can a community, whose *raison d'être* is its faith in the absolute reality of its transcendent religious doctrine and the code of ethics and law that derives from it, face the challenge of a modern tradition that attacks not only its institutions but the roots of its belief?'⁴²³

In his neo-Sufi phase Adonis was strongly opposed to all closed intellectual systems. He therefore dissociated himself utterly from the SSNP. The complete circle is an incipiently totalitarian one, but his mystical circle forestalled the possibility of closure for the sake of individual freedom. The limitless cosmos of mysticism which he began to explore goes beyond the notion of a definitive teleological narrative or final order. As will become clear, this would become a central theme in his later work. Nevertheless, as an erstwhile devotee of SSNP ideology who became the *quṭb* of his own esoteric world, on an intellectual level Adonis merely

⁴²² Adonis, *Pages*, p. 106

⁴²³ Yamak, *op.cit.*, p. 6

transcended as much as he rejected Sa[‘]āda’s dynamic mission. It was out of this intoxicating mix of [‘]Alawism, Sufism and SSNP ideology that his distinct worldview originally emerged.

Thunder on the Desert: Mihyār the Damascene

Adonis' *Songs of Mihyār the Damascene* is widely acknowledged as an important transition both in his work and in modern Arabic poetry more broadly. The mysterious, self-contradictory persona of Mihyār ushered in a more oblique, surrealist style to articulate Adonis' hopes for renewal. Paradoxically, however, in place of the discarded religious heritage, Mihyār instigates a religious revival. His tone is unambiguously prophetic: each section opens with a 'psalm'; he calls rejection his 'bible'; he comes to 'proclaim the resurrection of roots' while 'carrying the prophecy of the seas in his eyes'. The paradoxical nature of this persona, who rejects religion but claims to be a 'heathen saint', a 'prophet and sceptic' a 'sorcerer of dust' and a 'master of darkness', expresses Adonis' idiosyncratic vision of change: the old god must yield to the new, exoteric to esoteric. The poet is demanding nothing less than a complete overhaul of his culture and its values:

I burn my inheritance, I say:
 'My land is a virgin,
 and my youth sees no graves.'
 I transcend both God and Satan...⁴²⁴

This audacious enterprise is clearly indebted to Nietzsche's 'revaluation of all values'. Mihyār is, Adonis admits, the intellectual progeny of Zarathustra⁴²⁵, who defiantly heralded the death of the Christian God. In the poem *The Bliss of Madness*, he announces:

I have danced to the setting of stars,
 To God's corpse⁴²⁶

And in another, he declares defiantly:

Today I burned the mirage of the Sabbath and the Jum'ā
 I tore down the veil of the House

⁴²⁴ Adonis, *Aghānī Mihyār al-Dimashqī*, (Manshūrāt Dār al-Ādāb, Beirut, 1960-1), p. 49

⁴²⁵ Adonis, 'There are many Easts in the East and many Wests in the West', *Banipal* 2 (1998), p. 38

⁴²⁶ Adonis, *Aghānī Mihyār*, p. 131

And replaced the god of blind stone
 The god of the seven days
 With a dead god.⁴²⁷

Clearly nothing is sacred. Nevertheless, into this pregnant void a new god must step:

We shall cross that sea to its end,
 We shall go on, and pay no heed to that god;
 We long for a new god.⁴²⁸

Between these two positions, Adonis recognises man's absurd relationship with the divine:

Unless we create gods, we die
 Unless we kill gods, we die.⁴²⁹

Mihyār himself is this new god. He transcends dimensionality; he is simultaneously present and absent. He is contradictory, surreal, chaotic, blessed with magic and miraculous powers. He claims to be 'reality and its antithesis, life and the world beyond life.' Like Zarathustra, Mihyār is an intoxicating expression of the unconscious mind. In a cultural sense, he is 'the thunder on the desert': the storm that washes away the present wasteland to prepare for a new tomorrow, revealing Adonis' yearning to return to the pre-fall state and start history anew:

I live in the garden of apples and in heaven
 In the first ecstasy and despair,
 In the hands of Eve...⁴³⁰

Adonis implies that by tying itself to a specific historical moment, Arabic culture has been severed from nature's perpetual revolution. A radical transformation is therefore necessary to restore man's organic relationship with existence. The poet's love for his land develops into a pagan, futuristic geotheism in which his broken identity is reborn:

⁴²⁷ Ibid, p. 106

⁴²⁸ Ibid, p. 180

⁴²⁹ Ibid, p. 149

⁴³⁰ Ibid, p. 47

I worship this gentle stone
 In its lineaments I have seen my face
 In it I have seen my rootless poetry.⁴³¹

Death and loss are offset by a new faith in the primordial dynamism of Mihyār, whose madness, which he calls ‘my master and messiah’, bears a clear comparison to Sufi *fanā*. The poet’s celebration of madness is an act of intellectual alchemy: the chaos, despair and meaninglessness that surround him – i.e. the madness of the world – are sublimated onto the level of esoteric vision, playing on the unconscious connection between madness and genius.

Death, like madness, is theoretically analogous to *fanā*: source of vision and new birth. Mihyār proclaims the ‘allure of death’, which for him is essentially knowledge of the other, of the unknown. By co-opting it, the poet conversely hopes to achieve rebirth. For Adonis, ‘The unity of the “self” is only apparent, for this self is fundamentally a rift. And the “other” lives deep inside the “self”. There is no “self” without the “other”. Living identity exists within the fertile, ambiguous relational tension between the self and the other.’⁴³² This reciprocity, or self/other dialectic, would become the basis of his neo-Sufi vision. Man’s psychic revitalization through contact with the esoteric is symbolised by the mutual validation of night and day, body and spirit, earth and sky. Adonis himself has recognized that his contact with the cultural other in Paris, where he wrote the volume, was a formative influence at this stage.

Before the seeds of the mystical outlook can come to fruition, the poet must confront the strange paradox between his rejection of God and his religious instincts:

I want to pray
 To the bewildered star in the sky
 And in my incense I would burn
 My sterile days, my songs,
 My book, my ink and inkwell,
 I want to pray

⁴³¹ Ibid. p. 46

⁴³² Adonis, *Pages*, p. 107

To anything oblivious of prayer.⁴³³

In *Songs of Mihyār* the poet resurrects the dynamic and innovative aspects of his heritage, symbolised by the iconic al-Ḥallāj. 'Elegy for al-Ḥallāj', the earliest neo-Sufi work to focus directly on him, encompasses the medieval mystic's multidimensional, Christ-like nature: at once mystic, poet, rebel and martyr. His mission and subsequent crucifixion fits both the Tammuzic death-rebirth and the *fanā'-baqā'* paradigm. Adonis emphasizes his poetic spirit and links this to the hoped-for resurrection of the Arab nation: al-Ḥallāj is the 'poet of the roots and mysteries', or the

Star rising from Baghdad

Bringing poetry and renaissance⁴³⁴

Terms like *ḥuḍūr* and *asrār* foretell Adonis' neo-mystical orientation. In the face of 'our recurrent death', Adonis' al-Ḥallāj is not only a social and political revolutionary, but a symbol of fertility and life. Here he symbolizes the poet's intense desire for cultural revival and human freedom, uniting all times and places, but set in a specifically Arab and Islamic context. He is an archetype for the perfect man of the future: the poet-prophet who will overcome the depersonalised language of institution and restore the primal bond between man and his self. Poetry here provides the conceptual link between the outer world of revolution and the inner world of mysticism: the perfect poet, like *al-insān al-kāmil*, straddles both domains. Self-transformation thus becomes coterminous with transformation of the world, since the self and world are indistinguishable.

Al-Ḥallāj, like Abū Nuwās and Abū Tammām, symbolizes the future, a time of freedom, for Adonis, who attempts to incorporate this idea into the open-ended structure of his poetry. By dedicating himself purely to his God, al-Ḥallāj was liberated from political control. For this modern Arab poet, the entire Sufi tradition comes to exemplify the sacred principle of human freedom. Adonis stressed this connection between poetry and freedom in his monumental study

⁴³³ Ibid. p. 173

⁴³⁴ Ibid. p. 186

of Arabic culture, quoting Jubrān that “Man can be free without being great, but he cannot be great without being free.”⁴³⁵

Conversely, institutionalised language, the antithesis of poetry, is a product of ideology which ‘shakes the very foundations of freedom and democracy. It is the language of death and massacre where both the I and the Other discover their deaths.’⁴³⁶ Adonis’ poetic project, therefore, is profoundly political, in that it attacks the theoretical and linguistic foundations of the *status quo*. If mysticism must be political, as it was in al-Ḥallāj’s case, it is a politics of the sceptic, the individual, the outsider, reflecting the uniqueness of each human being.

⁴³⁵ Adonis, *al-Thābit wa al-Mutaḥawwil: Baḥth fī al-Ibdāʿ wa al-Itbāʿ ʿinda al-ʿArab*, (Dār al-Sāqī, Beirut, 2002), vol 4, p. 177

⁴³⁶ Adonis, *Pages*, p. xv

The Madness-Prophecy Dialectic and Adonis' Intellectual Forebears

He who questions the epistemological underpinnings of society is often marginalized, exiled, or labelled insane. In creating the mad prophet Mihyār, Adonis was consciously influenced by the Lebanese romantic poet Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān (d.1931), who saw a fundamental incompatibility between old and new in Arab life. Like Adonis, Jubrān was a mystically oriented Arab poet from a religious minority who lived in exile. For both writers, madness represents the destruction and transcendence of inherited values and norms, which are remade by a new prophet. This deconstruction-reconstruction dialectic incorporates the circularity of human social development: the prophet's coming is at once a departure into the future and a return to the beginning. Likewise the structural analogy with the mystical progression from *fanā'* to *baqā'*: deconstruction of partial self (ego) prior to restitution of the universal self. This deconstructive madness is analogous to Sufi *fanā'* because it alters the human-divine relationship from exoteric to esoteric. As demonstrated previously, the prophet's role – reconstruction of the world – is directly linked to Sufi *baqā'*. The implication is that the process of deconstruction and reconstruction will restore lost balance and meaning to the world, just as the fusion of exoteric and esoteric aspects of the self produces the “perfect man”. The primary impulse for both writers, therefore, is a mystical romanticism, although the destructive element is more prominent in *Aghānī Mihyār*.

In this context, madness represents freedom from limitations of perception, whereby ‘God and the human being become a single being with two manifestations: God is the tomorrow of the human being, while the human being is a stem and God is the flower of that stem.’⁴³⁷ Madness is a destruction of boundaries, a vision of inner truth, and an opening of the door to Infinity. For Jung, the confrontation with the unconscious (c.f. *fanā'*), when overcome (c.f. *baqā'*), leads to a higher level of consciousness. On a philosophical level, Adonis links this dialectic to the Sufi conception of human and social perfection. In his destructive element, Mihyār is an ‘argument against this age’, invoking death, chaos and madness:

I attack and annihilate, transcend and despise. Where I transcend, the waterfall of another world flows,
Death and the inaccessible.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ Adonis, *al-Thabit wa al-Mutahawwil*, p. 155

⁴³⁸ Adonis, *Aghānī Mihyār*, p. 39

This fierce, intoxicated annihilation is a preparation for the new prophet. The madman and prophet archetypes stand in mutual validation, forming a self/other unit. Adonis views Jubrān as ‘a continuation of the ancient Eastern tradition of prophecy,’ which is the essential ambition of great men.⁴³⁹ This religious overtone can be seen as an expression of cultural authenticity. However, Adonis’ prophet is not a passive receiver of divine revelation, but an active creator of esoteric vision. Prophecy is a dynamic mission, ‘for the prophet must also fight and wage war in the path of justice...’ He argues that this Jubrānian conception of prophecy is a form of humanism, since Jubrān ‘offers himself as a prophet for human life in its natural and unknown aspects, but without delivering any divine message.’⁴⁴⁰ Adonis therefore empties the concept of prophecy of its divinity (*lāhūt*) and establishes it in the realm of humanity (*nāsūt*), comparable to the esoteric conception of the divine in Sufism. Humanist prophecy, then, ‘sees what is hidden and follows its call, and “hears the secrets of the Unknown”’.⁴⁴¹ Adonis’ view of Jubrān as a radical renewer of Arab reality stands in marked contrast to his dismissal of his contemporaries. His own outlook is directly inspired by his interpretation of Jubrān’s poetic attempts to reveal the Unknown and transcend reality towards the future.

Both the Jubrānian and Adonisian visions reveal the pervasive influence of Nietzsche, himself the harbinger of a new prophet and unifier of ancient and modern. Nietzsche, at once both the culmination and the destroyer of the Western metaphysical tradition, was a formative influence behind Adonis’ new vision of Arab-Islamic civilization. His pagan god, Dionysus, fits well into the (neo-)Sufi model: ecstasy, intoxication, primitiveness and madness, in short, man’s irrational dimension. The Dionysus-Apollo dialectic corresponds to the synthesis of esoteric and exoteric in the perfect man. Adonis is well aware of the deep structural affinity between these two gods as symbols of nature and culture. By uniting them in Mihyār, the poet reaffirms Nietzsche’s transcendence of logical opposites, good and evil:

I choose neither God nor Satan –
Each is just a wall
that closes my eyes.

⁴³⁹ Adonis, *al-Thabit wa al-Mutahawwil*, p. 147

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 148

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, p. 148

Why change one wall for another,
 when my perplexity is
 that of the illuminator, the omniscient?⁴⁴²

Traditional morality and the inherited religio-cultural infrastructure must be discarded as the first step in the poet's search for a new and free existence. Adonis removes the cornerstone of the exoteric bridge between the Western and Islamic traditions and rebuilds it along esoteric lines. Nietzsche and Jubrān's outlook are connected at this deeper level, despite their different civilizational backgrounds.

For Adonis, Nietzsche's "death of God", the decisive break that led Western thought towards the endless flux of postmodernism, merely signifies the demise of the traditional conception of the divine, rather than the disappearance of the noumenal realm. In this context, it opens the way towards a renewed esoterism. Nietzsche is therefore a starting point for two parallel intellectual trends, and his atheism paradoxically reveals the divine nature of man.

Nietzsche's madman and prophet, Zarathustra, was a direct influence on Jubrān and, later, Adonis. The nihilism inherent in Adonis' cultural *fanā'* reflects Nietzsche's critique of the divine sanction behind Western morality and the consequent reconciliation between man and God. After Nietzsche, the divine vision becomes humanized: the journey to God is now a confrontation with the unknown self. Adonis explicitly links this unknown, irrational world to the future, the temporally unknown, maintaining that logic can only govern what is known and therefore effectively past. Miḥyār is a creative fusion of the ancient man – primordial, natural, irrational – and the modern – progressive, rational, future-oriented. He is the microcosm of the perfect society: free, open and dynamic. The fluidity and restlessness of this archetype, reflecting the permanence of change in the universe, is but the outer face of an unchanging essence. The freedom and creativity at the heart of Adonis' social vision acquire value in proportion to their revelation of their unknown Source. This reconciliation of opposites is the abstract form of his mystical vision, as typified by Jubrān, who is 'at once modern and classical, realistic and mystical, nihilistic and revolutionary.'⁴⁴³ Likewise, Adonis paradoxically attempts to continue the

⁴⁴² Adonis, *Aghānī Miḥyār*, p. 48

⁴⁴³ Adonis, *al-Thābit wa al-Mutaḥawwil*, p. 191

past by breaking radically with it. The future is given meaning through preserving the dynamic elements of the past.

Mihyār exemplifies the Nietzschean and Sufi notion of man's contradictory status. His madness and prophecy, or deconstruction and reconstruction, while opposites, stand in a dialectical relationship to one another, creating something new and original. Adonis' vision of man and existence is a committed one. By decoupling the concept of prophecy from divinity, he aims to restore it to its original mission and direct it towards a humanist goal.

Nietzschean and Jubrānian anthropocentrism stands in fundamental philosophical opposition to the theocentrism of high Islamic culture. Continuing this intellectual movement, Adonis dreams of liberating Arab society from the inherent stasis of its theological system. Beyond these two thinkers, it was in the Sufi movement – an integrally Arab-Islamic phenomenon – and its internal conception of the divine, that he found an intellectual trend emphasizing the centrality of man, rather than God, in the creative act. That the Sufi dialectic underpinning his civilizational critique emanates from within that same civilization affords it far greater cultural authenticity, even if it initially required engagement with the cultural other.

Poetry as Esoteric Vision

In a long essay on Jubrān's contribution to Arabic thought, Adonis articulates and defends his own profoundly esoteric definition of poetry. In its simplest terms, poetry is the expression or revelation of the Unknown. It is therefore a 'vision' that occurs 'only through separation from the tangible [exoteric] world'.⁴⁴⁴ Given the necessity of unconsciousness, it follows that Adonis' poetry is replete with dreamlike images and sequences.

Adonis' description of poetic vision is essentially identical to the classical Sufi descriptions of divine illumination: those endowed with this vision in the first degree 'see the thing in its reality, while others see it less clearly, according to the degree of their preparedness.'⁴⁴⁵ Just as the Sufi must purify his heart to achieve mystical union and enlightenment, so the poet requires an equivalent discipline to perfect his vision, which emanates not from the eye but the heart, the classic Sufi symbol for the essence of the human psyche. The heart, according to Adonis, must overcome the visible world in order to attain truth. Vision is not the result of logical causality, but arrives suddenly and unexpectedly, like mystical illumination (*ishrāq*). Adonis therefore subscribes to a classically mystical conception of poetic language, implying the inferiority of all other writing.

Adonis attributes to his poetic vision all the familiar characteristics of the unitive state of Sufism: contradictions are reconciled, reason and logic overruled, time and place transcended. This vision, according to ibn al-ʿArabī, is 'a continuation of divine power'. Following the latter's comparison of vision to the womb, Adonis calls it 'a kind of union with the Unseen'. The womb is the state of pre-fall perfection, the psychological equivalent of the *fanā*'/*tawakkul* to which the Sufi aspires: total annihilation and dependence on God. Aware that this state is theoretically coterminous with death, Adonis emphasizes the idea of rebirth from this divine womb. However, despite his insistence that the Unseen is the locus of perpetual regeneration and eternal possibility, the logical impasse remains: union with the Unseen is tantamount to death, and the world of change is the world of imperfection.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 149

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 149

Despite his passion for an active approach to self-knowledge, Adonis sees no contradiction in describing vision of the Unseen as a revelation, which places the poet in a passive relationship to the source of his vision. In ego-consciousness, man and Nature are independent actors, but to reach the creative Source, man must surrender his ego. This accounts for the hazardous reputation of the Sufi journey. Whether the poet can penetrate unconsciousness and regain his individuality is ultimately a question of faith.

If vision of the Unseen entails perpetual regeneration, then it is also a source of constant innovation, especially on the level of form, as Adonis' own poetry shows. Since the state of *fanā'* lies beyond physical form, all forms can theoretically express it. This concept of vision therefore inheres a constant innovation of poetic form, as ibn al-^cArabī said, "My heart has become capable of every form". Form and content thus conceived are but two sides of an indivisible whole. Adonis insists that what one says and how one says it are fundamentally inseparable, and therefore that transformation of reality requires transformation of the means of expression, i.e., the Arabic language. This is the rationale behind his desire 'to put the language to death' and start anew. This argument legitimises his poetic project: he is transforming reality by transforming the prism through which it is seen. It is this perpetual innovation, Adonis avers, that is the key to freedom, which may account for his statement that "the Arab poet's only shelter is the hell of exile"⁴⁴⁶.

For Adonis, then, perpetual innovation belies an essential stability, perceived by the poet with the eye of his heart. Paradoxically, this logical contradiction is evidence of the strength of poetic vision, where opposites are unified. As mysticism dispenses with logical opposition, true poetic vision must likewise transcend it. Poetry based on such a unitive experience has the advantage of disqualifying standard criteria of rational judgement as unable to penetrate its meaning. As Adonis puts it: 'the heart liberates, the mind imprisons.' This vision is an enactment of the simultaneity principle, the notion that something is itself *and* its logical opposite at one and the same time, which is in fact the key to Sufi *baqā'*.

⁴⁴⁶ Adonis, *Pages*, p. viii

Madness, Existential Transformation and Rejection of the Sharī'a

Adonis explicitly links madness, his first stage in remaking the world, to dream, vision and poetry in a circle of mutual authentication. Such reasoning doubtless leads to a revolution in the poet's own being, if not his external reality. But this constant overcoming is also inherently unstable. The poet is aware of this 'tragic tension' or 'vertigo' that comes with contact with the Unseen; his answer is to transcend madness to the level of prophecy, which entails 'the desire to arrive at the impossible place, to know what cannot be known', and corresponds to the progression from *fanā'* to *baqā'*.

Madness, Adonis claims, is 'the pull towards a strange and distant world' behind external reality, fundamentally transforming the relationship between man and God away from that of slave/master, son/father, creature/creator. This esoteric outlook implies a radical subversion of the traditional external order: orthodoxy, patriarchy, passivity and "pastism". Madness, then, must be 'a rejection of the prevailing law', a tool to help deconstruct Arab reality. However, it simultaneously obliges him to abandon the concept of perfection, of completing the circle. A complete existence symbolizes the past, and 'the future is lack'. Madness is a double-edged sword: it liberates the poet and yet ensnares him in an endlessly unfulfilled desire. Imperfection and openness, therefore, replace the impossible goal of permanent mystical unity. Adonis' "madness" thus reveals the parallel between mysticism and postmodernism.

A counter-orthodoxy idealizing difference and infinity might seem irresponsible. But Adonis' madman merely heralds the prophet, who will replace the destroyed values. Destruction and innovation are legitimate only to the extent that they lead to truth. In Adonis' view, the death of the traditional god has produced a dangerous nihilism, which is 'the distinguishing feature of the present Arab era'. But this nihilism could be a *transitional* moment – a 'time between ashes and roses' – towards a more perfect existence, just as *fanā'* leads to *baqā'*. In this light, Adonis refers to Jubrān's "The Madman" and "The Prophet" as two halves of a whole that showed 'the error of the interpretation of world and man in traditional religion and ethics' and engendered a positive new ethics through which individuals and societies can grow. Thus Adonis synthesizes the themes of madness and prophecy to envision a wholesale linguistic, cultural and political renaissance of Arab civilization.

This total transformation carries an inevitably heretical conclusion: rejection of the *sharīʿa*, of which the Sufi movement is the clearest example in Islamic history. According to orthodox theology, the *sharīʿa* is the definitive actions of a Muslim. Sufism, prioritising the *ṭarīqa*, approached this idea from the opposite direction: truth is less external observance than internal spiritual orientation. As an alternative, anti-orthodox strand of Islamic civilization, Sufism is a symbol of life and intellectual dynamism for the poet. If clinging to external traditions represents a form of slavery, or death, Sufism, by contrast, is ‘a revolution against the past, towards the future’. Adonis, like Jubrān, yearns for the coming of he who ‘is not enslaved and does not enslave’, that is, the perfect man.

Contrasting esoteric and exoteric values, Adonis effectively sees the *sharīʿa* as a conceptual prison imposed upon and internalised by Arab man, who can therefore escape into ‘the other, real world which has no walls or barriers around it’. This transcendence has three stages: awareness of imprisonment, certainty of the existence of another, superior reality, specifically identified as ‘Sufi reality’, and desire to reach it. His search for this other reality by definition entails rejection of *sharīʿa* reality and, he proposes, illuminates the true meaning of mystical terms like *ṭarīq* (path), *safar* (journey) and *waḥda* (solitude). The latter, for the Sufi, brings not removal from fellow men but unity with them, ‘a deepening of the connection between man and the other.’ The Sufi’s inward retreat into *fanāʾ* before returning to the world is psychologically related to the prophetic *hijra*: the retreat into solitude to receive revelation for his people, as in ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr’s ‘I spurn you... in order to know you’: only internal inspiration can improve external reality. If seclusion from the world is merely precedes greater participation in it, what appears to be escapism can be a sign of true commitment.

Adonis’ rejection of external restrictions on human freedom and his embrace of Sufi values demonstrate that man – in his simultaneous individuality and universality – is the axis of his vision. His neo-Sufism is a testament to man’s inner freedom. Man and God become one, revolving in permanent flux (*taḥawwul*) at the centre of the cosmos, in direct contrast to the *thabāt* (stasis) of the exoteric edifice. This extreme position – a product of both tragic devotion and brutal honesty – is a reaction to what he sees as the inertia and death of Arab-Islamic culture. If the objective is civilizational rebirth, his extremism is theoretically a temporary measure.

However, it runs the risk of becoming so removed from reality as to lose all relation to it. In this spiral into obscurity lies both the beauty and the tragedy of Adonis' thought: the future prophet is left waiting as the madman hits the wall of the present.

The Influence of al-Niffarī

If Adonis finds the mystical in Jubrān and the seeds of the postmodern in Nietzsche, both his poetic⁴⁴⁷ and prose⁴⁴⁸ writings leave little doubt that his principal inspiration is the wandering Iraqi Sufi al-Niffarī (d. c. 976). Inspired by his mystical experiences, al-Niffarī appears to have constructed a well-defined science of Sufism. For Adonis, al-Niffarī is the pioneer of a revolutionary epistemological outlook that views Qur'ānic interpretation metaphorically and tradition iconoclastically. In short, he is the archetypal esoteric figure who, like al-Ḥallāj, sees himself as answerable only to God, i.e. his inner self.

To ascend the hierarchy of al-Niffarī's *mawāqif* (stations) is to graduate from the dualist/exoteric existential view towards the unitary/esoteric view, i.e. *wahdat al-wujūd*. Like ḥAlawī theology, al-Niffarī's schema comprises into three main categories or levels of consciousness: *ʿilm*, *maʿrifa*, and the highest, *waqfa*, which is specifically⁴⁴⁹: the presence of God; the gate of vision (*ru'ya*); freedom from the slavery of the world; the destroying hand, or wind, of God; emergence from unreality; the realisation that all prior states were otherness.

Waqfa 'sees only God' and is 'beyond the utterable'; it is the point at which all duality becomes unity. However, it remains a station 'relative to God' rather than total identification with Him. As Adonis acknowledges, the mystic's longing for God, the Absolute, Infinite Truth, will therefore never be quenched. The seeker's attempts to reach Him only compel him to redouble his efforts, and distance from Him paradoxically increases with proximity. This exponential deferment of union in al-Niffarī's doctrine produces something akin to postmodern relativism, albeit posited around a hypothetical Absolute.

Al-Niffarī draws an important contrast between the *wāqif*, the mystic/esoterist position, and the *ʿālim*, the theologian/exoterist position: "the *wāqif* is not approved by theologians [*ʿulamā*'] nor does he approve of them... the *ʿālim* is in slavery... the *wāqif* is free... the *ʿālim* tells of command and prohibition, and in these his *ʿilm* consists... the *wāqif* tells of God, and in God his

⁴⁴⁷ See for example Adonis, *Kitāb al-Taḥawwulāt wa al-Hijra fī Āqālīm al-Nahār wa al-Layl*, (al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, Beirut, 1965)

⁴⁴⁸ See for example Adonis, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, (Saqi, London, 1990), pp. 62-4

⁴⁴⁹ Al-Niffarī, *Mawāqif*, pp. 14-24

waqfa consists.” He asserts that the *wāqif* “almost overpasses the condition of humanity (*bashariyya*) and... transcends the quality of phenomenal existence. [He is] separated from limitation [and] nearer to God than any other thing.”⁴⁵⁰ The *wāqif*, therefore, is much closer to Truth, or freedom, than the *‘ālim*. Adonis endorses al-Niffarī’s contrast between the *‘ālim*’s prohibitions and legislations, which maintain temporal power, and the *wāqif*’s transcendence.

Adonis contends that modern Arab political parties have merely changed the face, rather than the essential structure, of authority, and have therefore failed in their revolutionary mission. From this perspective, religious and governmental authorities are both oppressive institutions founded on secondary principles of *‘ilm*, exoteric knowledge, which have, al-Niffarī claims, “no penetration of God”. Absolute power and absolute truth are mutually exclusive. The *‘ulamā*’ guide only to the *obedience*, not the vision, of God. In establishing themselves as “Truth”, they and their secular counterparts merely demonstrate their own will to power, to which all is subordinate. Unquestioning allegiance – whether to God or the state – only substantiates institutional authority. Through al-Niffarī, then, Adonis exposes the conflation of power and truth that produces tyranny and alienation. The parallel between the *waqfa/‘ilm* and truth/power dichotomies illuminates the dialectic between exoteric and esoteric interpretations of Islam, between Order and chaos. Adonis’ professed aim is to harness this inner chaos to regenerate the external order.

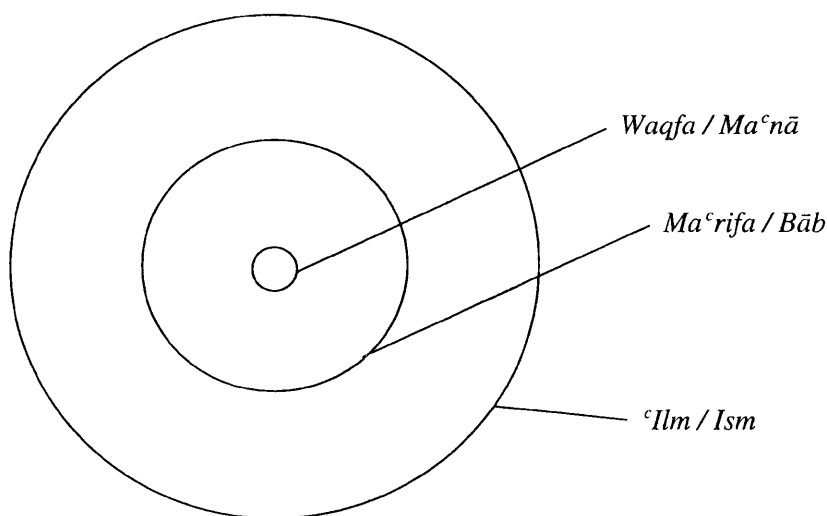
If poetry for Adonis is a ‘vision’, then the gate of this vision is *waqfa*, which “severs the bond between the mystic and things... establishes the heart and effaces existence [completing] the identity of subject and object... Vision consists in seeing God in everything...”⁴⁵¹ Adonis aims to exemplify such characteristics – reconciliation of opposites in unity, transcendence of physical condition, universal Presence – in his poetry. The reconciliation of opposites, or the idea of complementarity instead of mere opposition, implies that obscurity belies a deeper clarity, as will later be demonstrated through textual analysis.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 15-6

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 18-9

Al-Niffarī tells us: “If the mystic’s call is answered by God, God makes him deaf towards the call of all other than Him”.⁴⁵² As noted above, the central principle in Islamic thought, Sufi or otherwise, is *tawhīd*, God’s unity, which annihilates otherness. To uphold this unity, the Sufi deems it necessary to eliminate any distinction between himself and God. Consequently, “the mystic must free his house of otherness, covering his face and heart until otherness goes forth, when there will be the laughter of bliss...”⁴⁵³ However, what this means depends on an exoteric or esoteric interpretation of ‘God’; the Sufi verifies the truth of *tawhīd* by pursuing the inner God. By invoking al-Niffarī, therefore, Adonis revives an alternative interpretation of Islam, emphasizing the pursuit of inner truth rather than external orthopraxy. This recalls al-Ḥallāj’s dedication to the inner God rather than the political authority that claimed divine sanction. Both al-Niffarī and al-Ḥallāj function as symbols of individual freedom and integrity as opposed to collective untruth. Through them, Adonis challenges the historical practice of Islam, if not the religion *per se*, exposing collective interpretations of religious experience as false. Al-Niffarī’s conception of Islam deems ritual merely the exterior function of a subjective and ultimately inaccessible Truth that requires constant reinterpretation.

Al-Niffarī’s tripartite concentric schema – *waqfa*, *maʿrifa*, *ʿilm* – clearly resembles the ʿAlawī hierarchy of *maʿnā*, *bāb* and *ism*. Accordingly, *waqfa*, or *maʿnā*, represents the highest stage of mystical consciousness, coterminous with the *quṭb*, or axis, of the world:



⁴⁵² Ibid, p. 21

⁴⁵³ Ibid, pp. 20-1

This structure, showing ascending states of consciousness from *‘ilm/otherness* to *waqfa/unity*, also occurs in al-Ḥallāj’s *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*.⁴⁵⁴ *‘Ilm/Ism*, theological or scientific consciousness, remains exiled from Truth. Al-Niffarī’s commentary on *ma‘nā*, the analogue of *waqfa*, again reveals parallels with *‘Alawī* doctrine: “God has manifested everything, and appointed order therein as a veil from its *ma‘nawīyyah*... The world may be considered as existing on two levels: on the upper level are the spirits and lights, on the lower level the bodies and darknesses...”⁴⁵⁵ This suggests a psychological connection between Adonis’ *‘Alawī* background and his admiration for al-Niffarī.

The section of Adonis’ *An Introduction to Arab Poetics* on al-Niffarī’s contribution to Arab creativity reveals, albeit implicitly, how his writing is a transcript of the mystical experience. As noted, this epistemological journey is exponential and endless. The seeker remains perpetually other. For Adonis, al-Niffarī writes on the cusp of “the gulf which ‘contains the tomb of reason and the cemetery of things’”, i.e., the *barzakh*. Here “moves his text, silent in its speech, articulate in its silence.”⁴⁵⁶ Since words are necessarily exoteric and the visionary experience esoteric, he must make the divine silence speak, an endeavour in which he deems al-Niffarī uniquely successful. This is likewise the paradoxical objective of his own poetry, which he strives to write in a ‘language of absence’. The importance to Adonis of this mission to make the silence speak is clear in the opening statement of his *Book of Transformations and Migration*, which quotes al-Niffarī: “Expression narrows as vision broadens”.

The goal of al-Niffarī’s writing, like that of mysticism, is to know the self in all its dimensions. This is not a stationary or linear pursuit: it involves a perpetual oscillation or flux between states. This recalls pre-Socratic philosophy, and specifically Heraclitean enantiodromia,⁴⁵⁷ the principle of alternate confluence and dispersion of cosmic energy, which Adonis finds in al-Niffarī: we find “an interchange of absence and presence in an eternity of light... images which engage and disengage, and move together and apart, outside all causality... clashing and harmonizing in a

⁴⁵⁴ al-Ḥallāj, *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*, p. 57

⁴⁵⁵ al-Niffarī, op.cit, pp. 23-4

⁴⁵⁶ Adonis, *Introduction*, p. 62

⁴⁵⁷ Adonis, *al-Ṣūfiyya wa al-Sūryāliyya*, (Dār al-Sāqī, Beirut, 1995), p. 75

beautiful, captivating frenzy.”⁴⁵⁸ The ideal text, then, attunes to the reality of existence in which change is the sole permanent.

Al-Niffarī’s mysticism alters the individual’s relationship to the Qur’ān from legal to ontological: “In this affirmation of the subjective the problem changes. According to the literalist view, it was, ‘How shall I act so that my conduct and my thinking comply with the law?’ but it becomes, ‘Who am I? How shall I know myself and know the truth?’”⁴⁵⁹ That said, the very same text implies the impossibility of this task. Adonis sees this text as the antithesis of institutional language, “a complete break with tradition”, simultaneously renewing “Arab creative energy and the language of poetry”. The aim seems to be an “existential union” between poetry and thought, reflecting the bliss of *fanā’*. Ultimately, al-Niffarī’s text of bliss is an experience of freedom, Adonis’ fundamental concern.

Al-Niffarī’s exponential experience leaves him in a “permanent state of unfulfilment”, absurdly striving after infinity. Unable to overcome the exile of the human condition, his mysticism, like postmodernist thought, seems doomed to an ecstatic failure. But poetry, despite its exile from truth, can function as a door, like the °Alawī *bāb*, towards the Unknown. Adonis highlights this paradoxical quality in the opening to his comparative study *Sufism and Surrealism* by quoting al-Niffarī: “See me, not my name, otherwise you see it and not me.”⁴⁶⁰

Adonis’ revival of al-Niffarī seems to authenticate his own position vis-à-vis modern Arabic poetry and culture, and may reveal more about him than about the latter. Through it he demonstrates that, at certain periods, Arab thought transcended the boundaries of orthodox theology, leading to coexistence and interaction between different epistemological systems. For him, al-Niffarī’s unique, qualitatively different register deconstructs institutional discourse by its very nature. Hence its relevance to modern times: it not only serves as the gate to self-knowledge, but subverts the supremacy of the socio-political institution.

⁴⁵⁸ Adonis, *Introduction*, pp. 63-4

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 63

⁴⁶⁰ Adonis, *al-Şūfiyya*, p. 171

It is in the *Book of Changes and Migration* that Adonis' modernist mysticism, heavily influenced by al-Niffarī, first becomes clear. In the surreal opening section, entitled *The Flower of Alchemy*, the poet and Nature become one. Quotes from al-Niffarī's *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*, are followed by references to Sufism in a poem such as *The Tree of the East*, which recalls Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī:

I have become the mirror:
I reflect everything
I have turned the water rite into your fire
I have changed the shape of sound.

I have begun to see you double:
You and the pearl that swims in my eyes

We have become lovers, the water and I:
I am born in its name
And it is born in me
We have become twins, the water and I.⁴⁶¹

The title seems doubly significant. Firstly, the tree is a symbol of nature and life, and indeed of the dual faces of the divine, reaching both upwards towards heaven and down into the earth. Secondly, this is a specifically Eastern tree, and for the Sufi tradition, the East is the source of truth, where the sun rises to illuminate the world. There is an element of cultural and spiritual authenticity here: the poet is announcing his transcendence of “West” – where the sun descends towards the relative darkness of external knowledge – towards an “East” of eternal illumination. Adonis himself follows this up in *Sufism and Surrealism*:

To reach this [highest] point means, for the Sufi, to depart from “Western alienation”⁴⁶², as Suhrawardī calls it... Both the Sufi and the Surrealist experiences show us how the life of man is an adventurous journey between his present, false life and his absent, real life. It is an adventure in two stages: firstly, becoming aware of internal exile, the alienated I, and secondly, the descent into the soul, into the depths of

⁴⁶¹ Adonis, *Kitāb al-Taḥuwwulāt*, p. 15

⁴⁶² Adonis uses a kind of wordplay here: the term “Western alienation” in Arabic is *ghurba gharbiyya*. Both words come from the same root, which insinuates that the West is synonymous with alienation.

the self. “Western alienation”, for Suhrawardī, is a good example of this adventure, as it occurs from two perspectives: exile, outside the “point”, which for Suhrawardī is “the East”.⁴⁶³

The East, then, represents truth, light and deliverance from exile, implying a contrast to the malevolent darkness of the West. Such dualism implies a kind of reverse Orientalism reminiscent of the discourse of political Islam. Although the use here is figurative, it was during this period – prior to 1967 – that Adonis began to voice his utter disillusionment with the West and vehement espousal of the Arab cause: “We no longer believe in Europe. We no longer have faith in its political system or in its philosophies. Worms have eaten into its social structure as they have into... its very soul. Europe for us – us backward, ignorant, impoverished people – is a corpse.”⁴⁶⁴

References in *The Flower of Alchemy* to the “fields of despair”, the “tree of sorrow” and the “withered tree” reveal Adonis’ gloom vis-à-vis the Arab predicament. Profound and unmistakable sorrow pervades the whole volume, and yet becomes a source of creative inspiration. The Arab poet’s “internal exile” is another form of “Western alienation”: he has lost his homeland, his sense of belonging. This, in turn, provides the impetus for the mystical return, in order to overcome external reality, the source of this “Western alienation”, and transform his being into truth. In this poem, this takes the form of union with Nature. Water, bringer of life, becomes his twin and lover, reunifying his split self, reunifying the whole. The focus on the East is a return to the natural surroundings of his childhood, when the organic relationship with the land remained intact, or when, in his own words, “I used to press my body to the earth, and roll in the grass as if I was fondling a woman’s body.”⁴⁶⁵ This theme of childhood, which, like Sufism, signifies psychic wholeness, becomes increasingly important.

⁴⁶³ Adonis, *al-Šūfiyya*, pp. 178-9

⁴⁶⁴ Adonis, quoted in Zeidan, *op.cit.*, p. 86

⁴⁶⁵ Adonis, ‘Many Easts’, p. 31

Sufism and Surrealism

The above discussion leads directly into a discussion of one of Adonis' major theoretical propositions: that Sufism and Surrealism, although superficially different and independent, represent parallel experiences. His comparative study *Sufism and Surrealism* (1995), the culmination of his career-long research into Sufism, provides an opportunity to examine his ideas. The book, which implicitly vindicates his own poetic work, assesses Sufism on five specific levels: knowledge, imagination, love, writing and aesthetics. Adonis argues that these aspects of Sufism share characteristics that are not only present in Surrealism but also distinguish Sufism from external or 'objective' approaches to truth.

From the outset, Adonis' understanding of Sufism clearly differs from its widely held conception as a religious movement. His thesis is premised on mutual exclusivity between Sufism and institutional religion. For him, prevailing interpretations of Sufism misapprehend its distinct nature: its 'religious' status is but a superficial veneer concealing its true orientation.⁴⁶⁶ Accordingly, the Sufi is a thoroughly anti-orthodox figure who sees all of existence as God, the "ultimate point", or as a manifestation of Him. God, in the Sufi sense, "is in fact existence itself in its dynamism and infinity." The congruence between Sufism and Surrealism is located in the deep structure of their existential and epistemological outlooks, which lie "beyond language, epochs and cultures". Adonis therefore interprets Surrealism as a "pagan" Sufism, and Sufism as a theistic Surrealism; both are esoteric disciplines that seek identification with the absolute.

On this basis, Adonis calls Sufism a mode of discovering the Unseen and an attempt to answer humanity's deepest questions that by its nature penetrates deeper than logical or institutional religious enquiry. Accordingly, modern science and traditional religion are relegated to the same epistemological level: that of *ilm*, external cognition. Transcending the rational is a definitive trait of the Sufi experience. There is a decisive distinction between external rational knowledge

⁴⁶⁶ In dealing initially with potential counterarguments he appears to some extent willing to accept that this is an unusual perspective. However, despite the particularity of his views, it must be acknowledged that Adonis has gained a profound knowledge of Sufism, perhaps unsurpassed among his peers, through his readings of ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Niffārī, al-Ḥallāj, al-Qushayrī, al-Biṣṭāmī, al-Jīlānī, al-Junayd, al-Miṣrī, al-Shiblī and others since at least the early 1960s.

and internal gnosis: one dictates that something can only be itself, while the other affirms the simultaneity principle, i.e. that it can be both itself and its opposite.

The Sufi return to the origin implies both a separation and assimilation between two beings: man and God. If the ontological monist perspective is followed, the separation is merely apparent: the Origin, God, “remains Himself, both in being manifested through His creations, and in their return to Him.” The parallel between Sufism and Surrealism, then, lies less in content or names than in the mode of identification with the “ultimate point”. Adonis’ concern with Sufism also relates to intellectual and spiritual freedom. When the mystic reaches the Absolute, he attains total liberation from external forces: the cultural, political or religious institutions that veil his full individuality. Sufism, Adonis claims, worships God “with emotions, doubts and innovations”, rather than orders and laws, re-establishing an intimate rapport between man and nature. It is, then, both a return to the primeval consciousness of Jung’s “archaic man” and a progression to the total consciousness of ibn al-ʿArabī’s “perfect man”, who share the characteristic of absolute freedom. These archetypes represent a circular totality: the snake with its tail in its mouth.

Sufism’s truth is thoroughly internal and subjective. God is immanent within man. Once aware of this “inner continent”, man becomes ready for assimilation rather than separation, sharing rather than supremacy. Fusion with the Absolute, therefore, is the “moment of love”, in which two entities both sides form a unity that exceeds the sum of its parts: “they are reality and the absolute, existence and what is beyond.” Related to this dialecticism, another characteristic of the Sufi experience emphasized by Adonis is its inherent creativity. In his eyes, the Sufi poetic experience redefines the concept of writing. As an experience beyond form, Sufism generated an explosion of poetic form that anticipated modernist ideas like the prose poem, which integrates form and content.

Adonis notes that Sufi principles are by definition marginal and individualistic. The Sufis’ radically different interpretations of the Arab heritage – literary, intellectual, religious and political – gave them a subversive dimension that orthodox culture considered dangerous and therefore heretical, denying its legitimacy and even its existence. In the Islamic and European contexts, Sufism and Surrealism have contested this anathematisation of the esoteric, and are therefore intellectual resistance movements against their respective orthodoxies. In the case of

Sufism, this is true only for the ontological (*wujūdī*) perspective, since the phenomenological (*shuhūdī*) perspective remains within the bounds of the *sharīʿa*. This for Adonis is tantamount to a wholesale denial of the esoteric, since deconstructing the human origins of the *sharīʿa* is his goal. Following Nietzsche and Foucault, he emphasizes the revolutionary momentum of intellectually marginalised groups: it is these “madmen” or “heretics” who undermine and regenerate the accepted order of things. Adonis’ view of Sufism reclaims its officially marginal and illegitimate status, creating a new centre of gravity and celebrating its alternative relationship between man and existence. The existential struggle of the Adonisian poet/mystic is to stand against all prior knowledge, certainty, and orthodoxy, perpetually destroying and recreating the world. The true poet is fundamentally *committed* to this position in the furthest depths of his being: he does not merely write poetry, but *lives* it.

The poet’s role, duty even, is therefore nothing less than to *change reality* through esoteric knowledge, which is precisely the role of the prophet. Thus Adonis combines these two roles into one revolutionary mystic archetype. Such a view, he contends, corresponds to a central tenet of Surrealism, namely that: “the poet is a prophet who reads the text of the world and intuitively knows the hidden laws of existence.”⁴⁶⁷ This substantiates his conflation of Sufism and Surrealism, suggesting a common goal of human perfection through integration of conscious and unconscious forces. This striving for perfection must be the meeting-point of Sufism and Surrealism: overcoming their temporal and geographical settings, reconnecting with man’s primal yet eternal energy.

Adonis attributes three further general characteristics to Sufism: indescribability, the existence of spiritual states beyond linguistic definition, knowable only through direct experience; ephemerality, the fact that such states do not last; and passivity, the fact that the Sufi surrenders his individual will (i.e. ego) to an uncontrollable higher power.

⁴⁶⁷ Veronique Bartoli-Anglard, *Le Surrealisme*, quoted in Adonis, *al-Ṣūfiyya*, p. 28

Sufi Epistemology

Adonis sees in Sufism a correlation between knowledge and proximity to God: the nearer the absolute point, the greater the knowledge. This knowledge entails not peace and certainty, but surprise and wonder, and is achieved by transcending the false individuality of ego-consciousness, i.e. *fanā'*. Adonis thus explains the Sufi saying: "Insofar as you are alien to your self, you are able to achieve knowledge" – and alienation is all too familiar to the Arab poet. His inexorable death-in-life, torn away from his sense of identity and meaning, finds an analogue in *fanā'*. But beyond this negation lies affirmation, as al-Junayd says: "the Truth... makes you dead in terms of yourself and alive in it". Paradoxically, therefore, the death of a specific identity anticipates the affirmation of a universal identity.

Adonis discusses various stages of Sufi consciousness: unveiling (*mukāshafa*), revelation (*tajallī*) and witnessing (*mushāhada*), which he compares to the reflection of divine light in a perfect mirror. These stages are accompanied or followed by the sudden divine gift of rapture (*inkhiṭāf*), itself comprising six stages in ibn al-ʿArabi's schema. Significantly, however, Adonis notes that the highest goal is not rapture, but for the Sufi to be "a means of increasing knowledge and perfection", i.e. to bear an external mission.

Adonis locates Sufism in the Eastern esoteric tradition going back to Buddhism and Taoism. Esoteric reality is by nature obscure and unknowable – a "hidden treasure", as Lao Tzu calls it. This perspective views existing things as an attribute or *function* of Existence, possessing only metaphorical presence. There are two classic analogies for this in Sufi literature: the sun and its rays, and the sea and its waves. Light is an effect of the sun, which precedes it existentially, but there can be no ultimate division between the appearance of the sun and that of its light. Similarly, the sea and the waves cannot be separated: "the wave is different forms of the sea; it has no existence independently of it. The sea cannot be without waves; it is apparent in every wave, in a different form, but remains actually single in all the waves..."⁴⁶⁸ There is no wave without the sea and no sea without waves: such is the relationship in Sufism between God and man. All existing things are divine insofar as they are a function of the Source. Adonis uses this

⁴⁶⁸ Adonis, *al-Ṣūfiyya*, p. 45

Sufi logic to clarify man's existential position within the context of ontological monism, in which nature is the existential Subject and man the object. Comparing Sufi rapture to the delirious discoveries of Surrealism, he argues that both movements sought to reveal man's unconscious mind and allow it to control them. Surrealist techniques such as dreams and hypnosis are esoteric experiences comparable to *fanā'*, spawning a spontaneous form of writing known in Sufism as *shath*, the expression of a higher Reality in which esoteric and exoteric are united. Indeed, in Adonis' view, this is the essential objective of both experiences: "the reconciliation of contradictions, or the unity of existence. This means the unification of the essence and the subject, the external world and internal knowledge." Theoretically, any speech or action in this state would issue in truth.

This brings Adonis back once again to the ancient existentialist Heraclitus. The transcendental principle – "Logos" – has various faces: water, fire, wind or earth, but always in flux. In Sufism, likewise, the same Essence – "God" – manifests Itself in endlessly different ways, illuminating the Qur'ānic āya: "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God" (2:115).

Creativity is an extension of this principle: the dialectic fusion between Self and Other, (i.e. Itself) produces infinite formal reproduction. Ideally, poetry and existence join at this *barzakh* of internal-subjective and external-objective. The universality of this "highest point" inheres an egalitarian outlook: higher and lower are equally attributes of God. Adonis retraces this to the theories of ontological monism and divine incarnation, despite the fact that most Sufis outwardly rejected the latter. He calls the Sufi path of knowledge "not so much a question without an answer as a horizon to be travelled", and horizons are in fact not straight lines but circles. Travelling this horizon is the key to freedom and identity, since "dualism is what keeps man in ignorance, prisoner of his individual, social and traditional ego, what keeps him a *stranger*". Unity, then, is an "awakening", overcoming man's worldly alienation towards a "recollection of what we were before our loss". The condition for illumination is "man's withdrawal into himself to live the essential inner life, cutting his ties with the outside world and its detached, rational epistemologies", something undertaken by both Surrealists and Sufis. In Islamic terms, this is a kind of *hijra*, migration, into the self, moving inwards from external alienation towards the eternal Source, providing a conceptual link with the Prophet.

Although the Absolute is always obscure and inexpressible, the poet, according to Adonis' definition, must nevertheless reveal it. A distinct 'language of absence', necessarily obscure and irrational, is therefore required. Adonis's quest is to circumscribe the infinite, to answer the question of questions. But the circle has no circumference, and can never be conclusively encapsulated.

In Adonis' esoteric revolution, the poetic instinct constantly renews man's exoteric view of the world. The key to this revolution is the moment of mystical intercourse, when the I becomes the other and vice versa. Its goal is to reveal the perfect parallel between the visible and invisible worlds, "so as to overcome the agonies of existence". Accordingly, he sees ontological Sufism as a genuine revolution in Islamic thought precisely because it issues from a premise entirely opposed to the prevailing epistemological methodologies.

Adonis compares the Sufi and Surrealist quest for freedom as a corollary of the open-ended esoteric experience. He argues that the logic of cause and effect – of the answer – alienates man, exposing him to external control and oppression, and ultimately betraying him. The endless question, conversely, subverts that authority and restores man's original freedom. Put another way, definition is exile: "when you define God, you exile Him, because you put him on a par with defined things". Adonis thereby appears to formulate an esoteric conception of the Islamic sin of *shirk*: God should not be defiled by association with definitions and names.

Accordingly, the mystical experience is akin to a psychic earthquake whose epicentre lies in the unconscious, but whose reverberations are manifested in intoxicated speech and writing. As such, poetry – the reflection of this experience – is necessarily obscure, ambiguous, and rationally incomprehensible. In it, Adonis attempts to create "a complete antithesis to everything that is institutional... not succumbing to any established path or precedent". The emphasis is on total novelty, uniqueness and flux, making it "a perpetual beginning". For Adonis, the poetic text is read precisely through its unreadability, capturing "the permanently indefinable". The internal structure of this writing is unity, even if the surface appears chaotic. Likewise, the unity to which the poet/mystic aspires annihilates the contradiction between life and death: "In the universal

presence of this unity, death is no longer the opposite of life, but becomes its other face, or another kind of life,”⁴⁶⁹ i.e. *baqā’*, life after rebirth.

In the super-rational Sufi experience, knowledge is achieved not through the mind but the heart. Following al-Qushayrī, Adonis tells us that, “when man has achieved this knowledge, he witnesses the Truth (God, Meaning) in every manifest thing, and worships it in every way. The knower is the perfect man who embodies all the attributes of existence, and is therefore a perfect picture of the Truth. His heart is a mirror reflecting his existence as a microcosm of the infinite Truth. Thus he bears witness to the Truth, and his heart contains it.” The perfect man is therefore God in microcosm, and his heart (*qalb*) is the axis (*quṭb*) of all Existence.

The infinite nature of the Sufi experience means that esoteric knowledge, or vision, is by definition an “endless horizon”, since it reflects the perpetual motion of the universe. This illuminated vision is for Adonis the true one, despite, or rather because of, its heretical status. The esoteric perspective rejects the separation between God and the world, viewing existence as simultaneously singular and plural; such harmony theoretically opens the way for infinite knowledge. If divinity (*lāhūt*) overcomes humanity (*nāsūt*), then external or partial vision of the truth is replaced by total vision. However, Adonis admits that even the highest esoteric knowledge is not perfect, and only further intensifies the seeker’s thirst. Desire for the Absolute increases with proximity to it, but since opposites are united, greater proximity paradoxically only yields greater distance. There is therefore an important *exponential* characteristic in Adonis’ interpretation of Sufism. What Jung calls “the disease of poets,” the burning desire to apprehend the impenetrable mysteries of existence, only worsens as the cure is taken. Considered as such, Sufism celebrates the fact that all things exist as a function of the unity of existence, and therefore are born and die at every moment. Existence involves constant regeneration, and to match it, poetry must be a constant innovation.

Adonis, then, views Sufi (self-)knowledge as the key to liberation from limits externally imposed on the individual. Pursuing this inner knowledge is the real experience, and by externalising it the poet guides others towards it. Sufi knowledge helps man to transcend the ideologies and

⁴⁶⁹ Adonis, *al-Ṣūfiyya*, p. 61

institutions that prevent his aspirations of full individuation and his experience of “real selfhood, real existence and real life”. On an epistemological level, then, Sufism represents a revolution against the metaphysical prison of the dominant culture, both celebrating internal truth and critiquing external reality. Institutionalized religion, state ideologies and rational thought are effectively epistemological veils that Sufism and Surrealism attempt to uncover. Only subjective knowledge, the stuff of the poet/prophet, can recreate the world.

Sufi Writing and Aesthetics

As he sees it, Adonis' poetic experience is a rejection of the prevailing reality and a search for a new one. Accordingly, the text itself becomes his world and homeland, the only place in which he can live. This explains his empathy with Sufi writing, "a genre on the margins of Arab cultural history," whose words were "places of refuge". Sufi writing spoke of an alternative reality beyond the dominant culture, and yet it became an integral part of that same culture. Adonis sees this Sufi writing as the direct result of gnosis, an "exclusive dialogue between the I and the You, man and God". Since gnosis has no logical end-point, such writing rejects the notion of closed knowledge and therefore orients itself towards the openness and uncertainty of the future. Whilst recording the intimate relationship between the Self and the Other, Sufi writing also attempts to reconcile past and future in a subjective moment of unity.

In emphasizing the subjective, supposedly unmediated nature of his writing, Adonis appears to exempt himself from objective criticism. How can the utterly subjective experience be judged by external standards? Moreover, total subjectivity is by definition almost impossible for the impartial reader to penetrate. In disclaiming objective constraints or standard aesthetic criteria, Adonis claims that his poetry is perpetually against the institution or group mentality, for individual *ḥaqīqa* over collective *sharīʿa*. He defines ecstatic writing as "diametrically opposed to traditional classical writing": spontaneous, irrational, chaotic, defying conventional aesthetics. Such writing is by definition marginal and exiled, forever misunderstood, and doomed to an almost tragic solitude. The intoxication of the creative experience produces *shatḥiyāt* (effusions) that remain objectively obscure but nevertheless contain a universal truth-value that can inspire the reader to constantly recreate the original experience in their own image and form.

The unitive experience in Sufism leads to a "state of revelation between the Sufi and God, in which God reveals his secret to the spirit: that it is He, and He is it" – the very same secret revealed by al-Ḥallāj's definitive *shatḥ*, *Anā al-Ḥaqq*. Adonis sees the *shatḥ* as the universe's "cosmic language", articulated by the Sufi, the by-product of an alchemical fusion between man and God. For him such an experience is not only entirely legitimate; it affirms the integrity and totality of the self as a focal point in the unity of existence in contrast to the rational limits of the religious institution. Sufi writing is therefore comparable to the spontaneity of Surrealist writing,

which aimed to “return words to their lost paradise” and “to free ourselves from social and ethical control, in order to properly understand ourselves”, totally rejecting the prevailing worldview. However, it seems that this anti-orthodoxy defines itself in opposition and can never attain universal legitimacy.

The Sufi attempt to reach the Absolute can be seen as a return to the collective unconscious, transcending ego-consciousness towards the ancient archetypes of mankind. If the poet’s mystical experience brings him to the level of the collective unconscious, his words may well have a universal validity. Sufi metaphors naturally incorporate image, symbol and myth, all of which are a meeting point between esoteric and exoteric, “a point of radiation, a dynamic centre that spreads in all directions”. This *qutb*-esque quality is, according to Adonis, what allows them not only to reveal the unknown, but to breathe new significance into the known.

In comparing Sufi *shatḥ* and the spontaneity of Surrealist writings, Adonis also relates *fanā’* to the principle of democracy: “the collective property of some works inspired by spontaneous writing are a testament to the faith in the democratic characteristic in the function of art”. Given his observation elsewhere that “the Arab poet speaks ever of freedom and democracy as illusions”⁴⁷⁰, this shows that his interest in Sufism is closely connected to his political critique. When all outer revolutions have failed, the mystical experience offer the possibility of revolution and human emancipation from within. The poet’s role thus becomes nothing less than “the liberation of mankind”, enabling others to reach this lost paradise that is behind reality”. Like al-Ḥallāj, he is the revolutionary mystic. Appropriately, Adonis discovered this idea not through the cultural self, but in the cultural other of Surrealism, which enabled him to look at Sufi writing and realise that their common objective is “to speak and know ourselves, and therefore to be”. Language thus conceived becomes the key to inspiration and therefore prophecy, the regeneration of the world. This is why, contrary to the notion of art for art’s sake, Adonis argues that

the essence of literature lies in its magical or transformational dimension, which aims to change man into a radiant being. Its role is not to create texts that are beautiful by and for themselves, but ones by which

⁴⁷⁰ Adonis, *Pages*, p. xv

and in which a natural, magical efficacy is created, and to establish the illuminating, transformative link between the unknown depths in man and those in the universe.⁴⁷¹

Writing, then, is a *risāla*, a *mission* of prophetic proportions, whose value lies less in its aesthetic qualities than in its transformative power. Despite his profound esoterism, or perhaps because of it, Adonis still wants to change the world according to his own vision. This is effectively the inauguration of a new religion. But can language really change the world? Did al-Ḥallāj's *shatḥ* restore truth to a corrupt social order or merely condemn him to death? The Sufi and the Surrealist, respectively, journey to the "highest point" to become a new *quṭb* (axis) of existence, bringing truth into the world. However, the same problem persists: by entering the world this truth is no longer itself but a veil. What alternative for the Sufi but to yearn for death, like al-Ḥallāj? Does such writing help us know how to live in the world other than in a permanent state of abstraction? The necessary obscurity, irrationality and contradictory nature of Sufi writing is at once the source of its liberating and inspirational power and of its incapacity to construct a viable alternative reality.

God is simultaneously present and absent in the Sufi experience. While the essential Self remains absent, and therefore cannot be spoken, Its presence is implicit in the emanation of "sparks" from the creative dialectic (*al-barzakh*) between absence and presence that forms, according to Adonis, as the basis of Sufi aesthetics. The perpetual distance of the Absolute, and the exponential quest to reach it, renders the Sufi poetic experience an absurd and endless undertaking, despite its captivating beauty.

Sufi writing expresses the point where logical opposites – self and other – meet in total unity. Everything necessarily becomes its other: death becomes life, night day, and thus acquires true meaning. Through this point, the aesthetic dimension in Sufism "encourages man to progress perpetually forward into what is beyond the finite and the known", constantly renewing himself to remain existentially alive. Adonis argues that the act of poetic innovation thereby reveals God's existence, since "the I and the not-I melt in a dialectical movement that transforms man himself into a movement of deep penetration (*istibṭān*) into existence and identification with its secrets". He maintains that self-knowledge comes only through this unitive experience, which

⁴⁷¹ Adonis, *al-Ṣūfiyya*, p. 132

“awakens things and explodes their secrets”. But existence in this alternative, unified reality is fatally undermined by its own paradoxical nature, the very thing that brings self-knowledge. To use Adonis’ own metaphor, the greater the sun’s illumination, the less able we are to behold it. Meaning is veiled by its own light.

Adonis knows that metaphor is the key to the poeticality of Sufi writing. It is the symbol of an inexpressible Truth. If permanent Islamic laws were derived from the religious text, poetry must be a secularizing force, inspiring freedom of interpretation and enquiry. In contrast to the eternal certainty of religion, the metaphor is a site of continual change and a subversive idea. In Adonis’ view, it renews thought and language, undermining any monolithic worldview by its very nature. Metaphor is a *barzakh*, a bridge to the Other, connecting man to the unseen world whose revelations are in continuous flux. Thus the poetic text becomes a site of struggle between literalism and figurativism for the identity of Arabic culture.

In keeping with his interpretation of Sufi aesthetics, Adonis defines poetry as “the movement of the human being, in feeling and in thought, to understand things and his relationships with them”, i.e. the act of harmonizing with the very pulse of existence. By definition, only those who explore both aspects of existence can achieve this. From this perspective, poetry acquires value to the degree of its esoteric orientation. Adonis likens this to awareness not only of the branch, leaf and fruit of a tree, but also the roots, sap and inner movement. The truth is “a mystery that lies within things”, reachable only by gnostic paths that liberate the individual from the arbitrary limits of the religio-political institution, or the culture of the exoteric.

Adonis sums up his experience of writing the self as “one of death, in the Sufi sense: death from all levels of the social exoteric for the sake of life in the cosmic esoteric. It is therefore necessary to transcend and destroy the exoteric.” He sees modern institutional language as a corollary of the dominance of the exoteric viewpoint; his esoterism is an attempt to overcome it and return to the wholeness of childhood. Thus the first and third stages in his psychological development complete a broken *mandala*.

To transcend the exoteric, the poet must discover a “cosmic language”, whose ecstasy reflects his inner experience and expresses the parallels between Infinite and finite. Language must undergo

fanā', just as the Sufi does. Poetry, then, is not only a literary project, but an existential one, changing the relationship between man and Nature. The poetic image, the dream, the vision, the *shaḥ* and madness are all variations on the *barzakh* between them. To articulate an absent essence, esoteric writing involves "a continuous destruction of forms". Ideally, form and content become unified and indistinguishable, like the Sufi self and other. However, the poet is merely the other, not the self: it is not he who articulates meaning through the image, but vice versa. Adonis does not write Mihyār; Mihyār writes him.

Sufi Love, Imagination and the *Barzakh*

Following the parallels between romanticism and esoteric tradition discussed in the introduction, Adonis compares the characteristics of the experience of love to those of the Sufi experience: super-rational, inexpressible and permanently transforming. The bliss of love is an existential union in which lover becomes beloved, shedding his own attributes to assume those of the other, in accordance with the classic Sufi dialectic of annihilation and subsistence. Human love, in Sufism, is merely a reflection of God's perfect Self-love, for all things are manifestations of Him. The union must therefore be between two people and no more and, as in Islamic *tawhīd*, human love brings the individual onto the divine universal level, an idea much explored by Adonis.

The bliss or *fanā'* of love is for Adonis a moment of madness, which begins "when the lover is no longer able to speak, or when words betray him". In this strange recess lies the essence of poetry: "the fleeting moment between... a madness that speaks and a speech that is mad..." Reciprocal dissolution in the beloved – the unique moment of intoxication when distinction between self and other becomes impossible – represents a *fanā'*-experience, the source of the poet's art, as in °Abd al-Ṣabūr's *Aghlā min °Uyūn*.

Love-*fanā'* is the death of ego-consciousness towards rebirth in the beloved. As such, the woman comes to symbolize the cosmic womb, progenitor of new life, embodying "total freedom". Al-Bayyātī's "religion of love" is a variation on this neo-Sufi theme: for him, woman becomes divine, or the archetypal earth mother. The lover dies to himself in order to live in her, just as the Sufi sheds *nāsūt* for *lāhūt*. Thus the Sufi transforms death into birth, and individuality into universality – Adonis quotes al-Ḥallāj's maxim: "My life is in my death". Love/death denies duality and affirms unity. The cyclical quality to this existential viewpoint suggests a psychological link with Buddhist *karma* or °Alawī *tanāsukh*: life brings death, which in turn brings new life. The idea of death as deliverance from all that separates the seeker from the Absolute is clearly attractive to a despairing, alienated poet. Death in life is liberation, rebirth. Love and death are an ascent towards the lost paradise of unity, the point where man meets his Reality and is freed from the shackles of his ego. In this context Adonis compares the religious and erotic experiences as ecstatic moments representing simultaneous death and resurrection at the moment of unity between self and other. This inexpressible moment elevates the seeker/lover

to a transcendent level, beyond definition, which therefore requires metaphor to be communicated. Paradoxically, therefore, the poetic language of mysticism and love is also the language of death. Adonis argues that this annihilating moment, or inner revolution, is the primary liberator of mankind.

If human love is part of divine love, it is a moment of perfect truth, a revelation of God. However, as noted, God is simultaneously present and absent in the Sufi experience. Poetic language therefore speaks of an essence that always remains elusive, however close it seems. The Sufi is entranced by that which will forever remain impossible. The exponential nature of the Sufi experience, wherein final union is a mirage, perhaps therefore undermines its liberating power. Does it merely exchange internal slavery for external? The poet/mystic strives perpetually after a dream, despite knowing that it cannot be fulfilled. Adonis claims the value is in the journey, not the arrival, but such neo-Sufi absurdity bears comparison to the endless relativism of postmodern thought.

The key concept of the *barzakh* (isthmus) becomes the axis on which Adonis' esoteric theory turns, and his poetry is an ongoing attempt to write through it. Following ibn al-[°]Arabī, he sees it as the locus of Sufi imagination (*al-khayāl*), where meanings appropriate their images. For the latter it is a technical term denoting the interface between esoteric Truth and exoteric creation, embodied by the perfect man who conjoins both domains. The *barzakh* is “the home of endless possibilities”, a site of perpetual transformation and creativity existing beyond logical barriers, where the human poet meets the divine and their alchemical fusion *exotericises* hidden Truth in the endlessly varying form of mystical poetry. Through this unifying moment, the divine Self returns to itself through the human other, which is a part of It. The restlessness and omnipresence of the *barzakh* accounts for the poet's endless quest, who strives to articulate the ever-changing image of Truth. For ibn al-[°]Arabī, this divine image is attainable only through the *barzakh*, the basis of *khayāl*. In al-Niffarī's schema, imagination is “the gauge of gnosis” (*ma[°]rifa*) and “the presence of divine revelation”. As it joins exoteric speech to esoteric Truth, the mystic at this level embodies Truth. The classic Sufi analogy of the double-sided mirror expresses this same process: at the point of unity, the Sufi “looks in a mirror, but he is himself that mirror”. This exemplifies *wahdat al-wujūd*: not merely beholding the divine mirror, but *becoming* it.

By linking imagination to vision, and therefore prophecy, Adonis collates the roles of poet and prophet. Following ibn al-^cArabī, he argues that prophetic inspiration has its origins in Sufi imagination, accessing Truth through gnosis. The prophet, who is *al-insān al-kāmil*, is an intermediary towards this Truth. It follows that imagination, i.e. poetic creativity, is the key to restoring reality to truth, implying that Adonis himself is a new prophet who has come to revive Arab life. In remaking reality, prophetic vision destroys logical oppositions, since logic “fixes the representation of the world within a series of oppositions... that create and preserve the fabric of society”. This is the latter half of Adonis’ deconstruction-reconstruction dialectic. Therefore, whatever deconstructs external reality – dreams, *fanā’*, hypnosis, madness (which rational theologians equate with Sufism) – has a devastating validity in Adonis’ Sufi-Surrealist vision, since it elevates man to the *barzakh* and gives him regenerative power. Adonis, then, claims to use the cognitive processes of Sufism less for their intrinsic value than their extrinsic power to change reality. However, it was the Surrealists that helped him reach this conclusion, as their connection with the unknown lead them “to re-examine their position vis-à-vis the external world and move towards a union between the ideal position and the material theses they subsequently built”, in order to reaffirm human freedom. Adonis’ supposed use of Sufism as external revolution finds support in the classical doctrine of *baqā’*, since transforming reality first implies rejecting it. However, the collective potential of this esoteric revolution remains debatable.

Of the *barzakh*, Adonis says: “Infinity is produced from this perfect integral dialectic between revelation and absence, image and meaning, nearness and distance.” But what appears is never fully apprehended: “Nearness is a flash in which distance seems only more distant”. Its contradictory nature renders it perpetually out of reach. And yet, “existence is nothing but a continuous movement of the dialectic of hidden/manifest and manifest/hidden... Man himself is a *barzakh*: a bridge between the shadow and light, and his existence revolves around the axis of transcendence towards the light. He lives through his perpetual desire for this transcendence.” The perpetual absence of the *barzakh* “is the source of his profound desire for death, that is, for life”. By unifying opposites, it turns all values on their head: “absence from the shadow is but presence in the light. Death is light: death is the real existence. The past is the light, and the present is the *barzakh* / the image, and the future is death: eternal life.”⁴⁷²

⁴⁷² Adonis, *al-Şūfiyya*, p. 151

The concept of man as the living *barzakh* reveals Sufism's humanistic message, in which divinity and humanity form one dynamic hybrid. Adonis' conception of the *barzakh* resembles a mountain lying between two countries, one of which lives in its shadow. The poet must leave this country and make the arduous ascent in search of light. Only at the summit of this mountain – the *barzakh* – does he see both countries and realise that they are in fact one. Here he receives the divine light rising from the east and reaches a prophetic level of consciousness. His mission is now to return with this vision back down to his fellow men, so that they might travel the same path, recreating their reality with his divine knowledge.

Such a vision is implied in Adonis' poem of the same name, *The Barzakh*, with its pregnant refrain: "Things shed their names; I do not name them..." Here the orthodox worldview is overcome by the direct relationship between poet and reality, beyond the distorting prism of naming. Things exist in themselves, for themselves, like the Sufi relationship with the Unknown. They are the subject rather than the object of his vision: "I am the silent one and He is the Word". Adonis reveals a fraught relationship with external reality throughout:

And the dream is light and fertilisation
 Upon it I was founded and built
 Oh reality, who named you, where did you come from?⁴⁷³

The dream is the *barzakh*, the bridge on which man meets his eternal nature, esoteric reality. It is a moment of access to divine transformation and creativity through which the poet remakes himself. The dream, then, is his departure from the dark country to scale the mountain summit, where union with divine light awaits. As Jung notes, myth performs an analogous psychological function. The land of myth is the esoteric homeland that cannot be defined geographically:

In the land of myth which I have chosen, I have a
 Home that has become narrower than my steps.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷³ Adonis, *Hādihā Huwa Ismī wa Qaṣā'id Ukhrā*, vol. 2, (al-Madā, Cyprus, 1996) p. 372

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 376

The Flux of Obscurity and Clarity

Since God is limitless, Sufi knowledge is infinite and therefore impossible to perfectly circumscribe. Physical or linguistic form is a human conceptualisation of divine essence. Due to its permanent transformation, Meaning can only be revealed to each individual according to his or her own distinctive understanding and forms. Man apprehends the Absolute not through Itself but through Its images, which oscillate between obscurity and clarity. It follows that clarity and obscurity are essentially the same thing. Esoteric and exoteric do not refer to distinct entities, but a single One viewed from different perspectives, two sides of the same coin. The exoteric other is merely a form of the esoteric Self, since there is nothing other than the Self. Meaning is present in the image and yet absent from it, at one and the same time. It is this relationship, according to Adonis, that holds the key to poetic language, and that he explores fully in the volume *In Celebration of Things Obscure and Clear*, a set of mystical meditations on life, death, love and nature that function both as a series of *shāḥ*-esque poems and one complete whole. Just as macrocosm and microcosm reflect each other, the knowledge of the world reflected in it is the very same self-knowledge that is the goal of the Sufi path.

The volume's central theme is the Sufi self-other dialectic: that the self can only exist through the other. Hence the statement that "light is the certainty of shadow", or that:

The most beautiful lamps, sometimes,
Are those we ignite
Not to bring light
But so that we can see the darkness.⁴⁷⁵

Beyond this opposition lies the fundamental identity of self and other, which is cosmic union:

Light is furthest, yet
Nearer to us than the nearest darkness
Distance is usually an illusion.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁵ Adonis, *Iḥtifā'an*, p. 48

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 36

At the locus of this cosmic union, the unconscious/divine, logical opposition is destroyed:

The sun doesn't say yes
 And doesn't say no;
 It says itself.⁴⁷⁷

Here the paradoxical becomes natural, revealing the inevitable truth within the self:

How strange then the lost lover –
 He is not me
 Nor is he other than me.⁴⁷⁸

This self is unified by a classic Sufi symbol for the divine:

The sea, with its constant glitter,
 Is the one who taught him
 To leave his self
 In order to stay in it.⁴⁷⁹

The reciprocity of meaning between self and other reflects the return of plural into monad in *wahdat al-wujūd*. This theme of cosmic integration inspires various natural *barzakh*-images, such as dusk, when day meets night, or autumn, season of change:

Dusk leads me to its possibilities –
 My face is split:
 One cheek in day, the other in night.

Winter is loneliness
 Summer emigration
 Spring a bridge between

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 63

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 83-4

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 13

Only autumn penetrates all seasons.⁴⁸⁰

The Niffarian exponentiality of the quest for truth and wholeness is also prominent. The circle can never be complete; there must always be a wound, for:

I was wounded early

And early I knew:

The wound is what created me.⁴⁸¹

Adonis never arrives; he only departs. The meaning of his journey ultimately lies in the quest, rather than its goal.

Every time I ask anything, I split into two:

My question and I –

The question searches for the answer,

And I search for another question.

You are born only from your lips:

You are born only from your questions.

His success in what he achieved

Is his failure

In what he hasn't achieved.⁴⁸²

Adonis sees any answer as a kind of ideology or false perfection, a betrayal. Heresy and exile are the poet's home; his life is an endless question. This is the logical conclusion of Niffarian epistemology, a mystical relativism which can only be quenched by "an inaccessible water". The circle of (self-)knowledge will never be complete. But there is a painful tension between his embrace of imperfection and the natural inclination for psychic fulfilment:

The fence that protected him

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 17

⁴⁸¹ Ibid. p. 57

⁴⁸² Ibid. p. 14

Is the wall that besieged him.⁴⁸³

The circle will only be complete at the moment of death: “life produces the death that is itself”.
The volume culminates in a Heraclitean embrace of death as the moment of real life:

Death in Arabic is a masculine word, and the spirit feminine.

Their relationship is one of union and dispersal.

You only really find the spirit in this union – death.

Death is cosmic sex, and this sex is real existence.⁴⁸⁴

Death and life are not themselves until they are each other, a cosmic reciprocity that occurs at the *barzakh*. The union of death is clearly equivalent to *fanā'*:

Entering death is a marriage, and obliteration in it is ecstasy.⁴⁸⁵

This brings us back to the original myth of the fall:

Birth is separation: the greatest happiness is not to be born –
to remain in the unity of the origin – death.⁴⁸⁶

Leaving the womb, then, means experiencing the pain of the human condition, which the Sufi strives to transcend through *fanā'* / *tawakkul*, as with °Abd al-Şabūr. The poet's village is psychologically analogous to this womb of non-existence:

I was born in a village

Small and secret like a womb

And I have never left it –

I love the ocean, not the shores.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸³ Ibid. p. 12

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 99

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 100

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 100

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 59

This surely marks Adonis' full emergence into the third stage in life, the quasi-completion of the circle back to childhood. He himself seems aware of this psychic development:

I hear bells and voices
Announcing my third birth.

I still walk behind the child
That walks in my limbs.⁴⁸⁸

But this third stage will only be complete upon entry into the Unknown – death – and all that lies in between is the fall:

The time has passed
For you to be yourself, to know who you are
Your childhood has gone.⁴⁸⁹

Adonis couches such existential meditations in the language of nature mysticism, repeatedly using limitless, intangible images such as air, sea and wind:

The wind – jumbled words
Uttered by the cosmic silence.

The wind – the one harbour
That moves endlessly towards the Unknown.⁴⁹⁰

His celebration of the wind culminates in a moment of pure Sufism, conjuring up images of the Mevleviyya's circular dancing *dhikr*:

The wind is the universe's whistle
The wind is dance
And all things

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 57

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 30

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 24

Are a stage for dancing.⁴⁹¹

The Sufi goal is to become the perfect universal microcosm. In Adonis' case, similarly, an intoxicating mix of Sufi, °Alawī, Surrealist, ancient Greek and other influences attunes him to the very pulse of existence, at whose divine source he constantly hints:

In the dust I touch the wind's fingers
In the wind I read the dust's writing.

Give me your face, I'll give you my wishes
And the storm is our promise:
Then you can lead me, oh sea.

The sky reads you
But only after the earth writes you.

They say imitation is easy –
Oh, if only I could be like the sea...⁴⁹²

Perhaps the clearest example of Sufi influence is the following lines:

The individual is a unity from the infinite
And the group is an infinite from the unity.⁴⁹³

This perfectly symmetrical couplet implies the Sufi principle of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, revealing the intimate relation between microcosm and macrocosm. But perhaps this vision of collective harmony can only be a dream:

The dream is a pillow
On which two loving heads lie –
The dream is singular in plural form.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹¹ Ibid. p. 22

⁴⁹² Ibid. p. 27

⁴⁹³ Ibid. p. 27

Adonis' mystical inclinations are by now overflowing, *shatḥ*-like, into every utterance. Each line seems to contain a universe. The circular motif – denoting both psychic fulfilment and perpetual revolution – frequently recurs under the surface:

Principle is always
A recurring deviation.

Your arrival here is most probably
The beginning of your real journey.

The horizon has as many faces
As the eyes that see it,
The light has many bodies
But only one face.

All time appears and becomes my face –
As if the orbit is slackening and something is beginning –
Will the circle of revolution really complete itself,
Will this world end?

I was stamped with heresy
And truth spread through me.⁴⁹⁵

Throughout this, the poet reiterates his desire for the sea – symbol of the divine – and the waves – symbol of change and revolution – over the moribund shore. As noted, the relationship between the sea and the wave exemplifies the unity of existence. Through his interpretation of Sufi epistemology, the poet becomes a human wave in the divine sea, always restless and dynamic:

The shore uses its time
To keep still
The wave uses its time

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 61

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 88

To keep moving.

Mildly / wildly

I break, and my sides shatter,

Still,

I want not a shore but a wave.⁴⁹⁶

The conflict between orthodoxy – the collective truth – and heresy – the individual truth – comes down to its most empirical, even geometric terms: the straight line, such as the Qur’anic *al-sirat al-mustaqim*, versus the *mandala* of individuation, which implies a unique path to wholeness. For the individualist Adonis, “deviance” will always be truer than collective “rectitude”:

Sometimes,

The straight line

Is a path that leads nowhere.

The straight line,

In love, is a circle.⁴⁹⁷

Adonis’ text functions like a linguistic *mandala*, a poetic circle performing *ṭawāf* around an untouchable core. The straight line can never enclose the other; it can only be a tangent leading away from this axis, whose inaccessibility only increases its pull:

Wherever you go, however you get there

Your spirit is the furthestmost place.⁴⁹⁸

This endless journey towards the axis of the self incorporates the “madness” of the unconscious, i.e. the super-rational simultaneity principle, or mutual inclusivity. Adonis’ sustained attachment to madness is a recurring milestone on the path to self-knowledge. Here it is a crossroads that reveals the simultaneity principle at work:

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 89

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 53

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 50

Madness is an eternal meeting with everything
And, at the same time, an eternal farewell.

You won't enter the night of the body
Unless you surrender to the sun of madness.⁴⁹⁹

Madness being a purely individual route, the poet knows that collective perfection is a dream:

However mad you are,
Your madness will not be enough
To change the world.

To gather people behind you
Means that they are walking in another direction –
In every gathering there is a kind of guilt.⁵⁰⁰

The simultaneity principle, or mystical identity of self and other, incorporates both logical opposites within the whole, and thus illuminates what is otherwise incomprehensible:

The purest thunderbolts
Come from the heart;
From the heart, too,
The blackest clouds.

You cannot be present
Without a certain absence.⁵⁰¹

One lacks meaning without the other. This integration and interdependence throughout the volume renders it a linguistic *mandala* reflecting the relationship between inner and outer existence, although the recurrent dualism always belies a deeper unity:

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 53

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid. pp. 65-6

⁵⁰¹ Ibid. p. 68

The transitory is what you surprise
 The eternal is what surprises you.⁵⁰²

Since unity and multiplicity are mutually valid worldviews, the poet celebrates infinite plurality, as exemplified in language:

Writing is a house that is built, but never completed,
 By this vagabond family, the alphabet.⁵⁰³

Adonis' veneration of childhood in this volume fulfils an analogous psychic function to Sufism. The recurring themes of completing the circle of life and returning to his earliest experiences recalls Jung's child archetype, a significant motif in the individuation process, which "anticipates the figure that comes from the synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements in the personality. It is therefore a symbol which unites the opposites; a mediator, bringer of healing, that is, one who makes whole..."⁵⁰⁴ Rediscovery of a lost past can play a vital role in the individual's efforts towards self-knowledge. The future means nothing without the past, although it cannot be imitated literally:

I still walk behind the child
 That walks in my limbs –
 Now he stands at the top of a shaft of light,
 Searching for a corner to rest
 And read the night's face once more.

What should I say to my other body
 That I left in the rubble of the house
 Where I was born?
 No, nothing can quench my childhood
 Except that star that glitters above it
 And sprinkles the sky's path with my steps.

⁵⁰² Ibid. p. 36

⁵⁰³ Ibid. p. 37

⁵⁰⁴ Jung, *Archetypes*, p.164

Still my childhood is born
 In the hands of a light
 Whose name I do not know
 It's him who names me.⁵⁰⁵

Significantly, the child archetype relates not only to psychic wholeness, but to *futurity*, a vital notion for Adonis. Through his confrontation with the unconscious he encompasses the different functions of time – past, present, future – within one unified continuum:

Words are yesterday
 As for the poem composed with them
 It is tomorrow –
 Is this the alchemy of poetry?

Love is our past steps
 And the past is our future dust.

Life uproots death – in order to remain.
 It is death, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

At every moment,
 The ashes testify that they are the palace of the future.⁵⁰⁶

Just as al-Bayyātī does with Borges, Adonis assimilates physical (exoteric) blindness with esoteric vision. This vision, like poetic meaning, lies beneath the surface, where the alchemical individuation process occurs:

In the past, you were blind
 But now, you are a future –
 Reading roads and space,
 Trees and fields,

⁵⁰⁵ Adonis, *Iḥtifā'an*, p. 58

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 8

People.⁵⁰⁷

As noted, an essential characteristic of this writing is its exilic status. Exile is a *necessary* prerequisite for achieving union; through it, the poet sublimates his spiritual alienation into gold:

Your homeland, poet,
Is the place where you can only be in exile.⁵⁰⁸

Adonis defines his new homeland from the premise of exile. *Fanā'* – “annihilation” – is a blissful existential exile from the outer world through which the poet/mystic can be reborn into *baqā'*. The pain of alienation is transformed into psychic redemption, centred round the axis of self-fulfilment. *Fanā'* and exile, as doors towards the Other and thereby the Self, are therefore analogous and necessary stages on the circular journey from the original to the final state, from birth to death, from archaic man to complete man. In this blissful void the new birth is incubated:

A reality –
In it the roads of defeat became
The only thing
That leads to the roads of freedom.

From one moment to the next, he is naked:
Nothing to wear except words.
He tires
And can only rest in his shadow.

The source is an inkwell – its water is ink
Pouring endlessly out, wandering endlessly around –
It can't even live in its own house.

He draws maps
But they tear him up.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 97

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 67

Be absent

So you can remain a question.

I always forget what I own

To increase my freedom from what owns me.⁵⁰⁹

This volume, then, can be considered as a *mandala* revolving around the hidden essence of the poet's self. Being simultaneously the centre and circumference of this *mandala*, the poet attempts to fully unite with existence, implicitly fulfilling the function of the esoteric *quṭb*, or axis. Perhaps the most significant line in the entire volume sums up this dialectical individuation process of *fanā'*-*baqā'*:

I have become connected to nothing, to become the axis of everything.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 27

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. p. 93

The *Qutb*

Through the various stages assessed above, Adonis' poetic project centres around the desire for a new prophet. The notion of an external mission through inner enlightenment suggests ibn al-^cArabī's doctrine of the *quṭb*, or axis, possessor of universal prophetic consciousness, a role for which Adonis implies his own aptitude.

As noted earlier, the perfect man's heart is the axis of his being (microcosm) and by extension of existence (macrocosm). Hence he becomes the all-seeing *quṭb*, representative of "Muḥammadan Reality". In the heart (*qalb*) lies each human being's own *quṭb*, the axis of his consciousness. Therefore, the *quṭb* is to the macrocosm, the universe, what the *qalb* is to the microcosm, the human being. By knowing his own heart, i.e. his self, the mystic knows the world. As change is the sole permanent in divine revelations, only through endless revolution can the perfect man's heart remain true to existence. In this process of identification, argues Adonis, the mystic *becomes* the Absolute, and may therefore say: "I am not the speaker, but the Absolute."⁵¹¹ This is the key to interpreting al-Ḥallāj's *shath* "Anā al-Ḥaqq".

The *quṭb* is a re-establishment of the original theomorphism, for "God created Adam 'according to His form'". Al-Qashānī refers to the *quṭb* as "the place of God's appearance in the world at all times".⁵¹² De Jong relates that for ibn al-^cArabī,

"the universal rational principle, the *rūḥ Muḥammad*, or *al-hakika al-muḥammadiyya* [sic] through which Divine knowledge is transmitted to all prophets and saints, finds its fullest manifestation in and is identical with the *kuṭb* [*quṭb*], who is *al-insān al-kāmil*. He is the cause of creation, for in him alone creation is fully realised. He is *al-barzakh*, the *hakikat al-haka'ik*... he is Muhammad as the inward aspect of Adam, i.e. the real Adam (Mankind) or *al-lāhūt* [divinity], which is forever manifesting itself on the plane of *al-nāsūt* [humanity] in prophets and saints (i.e. in *akṭab* [pl. of *quṭb*]) who come within the category of *al-insān al-kāmil*, since they are perfect manifestations of God and have realised, in mystical experience, essential oneness with Him. This makes *akṭab* infallible, and since there is only one *kuṭb* at a time (*al-kuṭb al-*

⁵¹¹ Adonis, *al-Ṣūfiyya*, p. 69

⁵¹² F. de Jong, 'Kuṭb', *EI*, vol 5, p. 543

wāhid), he is God's real *khalīfah*, who is the preserver and maintainer of the universe, the mediator between Divine and human...⁵¹³

The concept of *quṭbiyya*, or *nubuwwa muṭlaqa* (absolute prophecy), unifies Adonis' diverse influences and inclinations, from the early °Alawī experiences and the secret hierarchy of the SSNP (with Sa°āda as its *quṭb*) to the concept of the *barzakh*, *al-insān al-kāmil*, Nietzsche's "Superman" and Niffarian *waqfa*. As "*al-kalima al-jāmi°a*" – "the unifying Word" – the *quṭb* is both a philosophical and linguistic cognate of the Heraclitean Logos, or cosmic energy principle. It has also been linked to the Shī°ī conception of the infallible Imam and the neo-Platonic *nous*. All these paths lead to *quṭbiyya*: the pinnacle of the esoteric journey, where man becomes the divine axis of existence and achieves universal vision.

Adonis' entire life project appears to culminate with the concept of *quṭbiyya*: "Annihilation in this unity is annihilation of ego-consciousness, i.e. its subsistence is subsistence in the Witnessed (God), where the Sufi sees himself on another level "and finds himself ecstatic, pure, revelling in everything, surrounded by everything, but at the source of everything".⁵¹⁴ The poet becomes connected to nothing to be the axis of everything, ecstatically achieving unity with all existence in its inner and outer dimensions. Self-knowledge is revealed to be world-knowledge. Thus the human poet comes to conceive of himself a divine agent, an esoteric *khalīfa*, despite the outwardly narcissistic impression this creates.

Despite the inherent elitism of the *quṭb* principle, Chodkiewicz notes that ibn al-°Arabī sees it as the *primus inter pares* of the *muqarrabūn*, a Qur'ānic term denoting "those close to God". Through his universal perspective, the *quṭb* sees that all things are equally faces of the Divine. In his *Kitab Manzil al-Qutb*, ibn al-°Arabi states: "The *quṭb* is both the centre of the circle of the universe, and its circumference. He is the mirror of God, and the pivot of the world..."⁵¹⁵ This reveals a remarkable parallel with the nature of God according to St Augustine, as Jung also

⁵¹³ Ibid, p. 544

⁵¹⁴ Muḥammad al-°Āmilī, quoted in Adonis, *al-Ṣūfiyya*, p. 123

⁵¹⁵ Ibn al-°Arabi, quoted in M. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn °Arabi*, (Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 1993), p. 95

notes: “in ecclesiastical as in alchemical literature the saying is often quoted: “God is an infinite circle (or sphere) whose centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere”.⁵¹⁶

This circle and axis theory produces the notion of infinity, as do the Niffarian schema of *‘ilm*, *ma‘rifa* and *waqfa* and the *‘Alawī bāb, ism* and *ma‘nā*. These threefold hierarchies culminate at the level of the *quṭb*, and are structurally analogous to Jung’s formulation of conscious, personal unconscious and collective unconscious. The divine level of *quṭbiyya*, then, is equivalent to the collective unconscious, where the poet/prophet apprehends the entirety of human existence. From this perspective, at the centre of the circle, the division between esoteric and exoteric explodes and the whole of existence is one, affirming the theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. This accounts for the non-existence of the circle’s circumference both in ibn al-‘Arabī’s view and Jung’s research.

It seems, then, that Adonis’ fascination with esoteric doctrines is part of an individuation process whereby he becomes the *quṭb* of his own *mandala*, and through it axis of the world, subjectively speaking. This seems a natural progression for the poet, seer of the age, and is reflected both on a semantic and structural level in the volume discussed above.

⁵¹⁶ Jung, *Archetypes*, pp. 324-5

Conclusion

Adonis' esoteric experience displays the following interdependent characteristics: super-rational, spontaneous, subjective, exponential, subversive, exilic, progressive, chaotic and permanently transforming. This is the nature of the total esoteric revolution that he envisages on all levels of human existence, from the linguistic and political to the cultural and spiritual. His poetry is the writing of this total revolution – sometimes a manifesto, often a dream, always viewing man and existence from within. Ironically, however, these esoteric characteristics at once bring profound insights and undermine his broader mission. Due to its extreme subjectivity, his liberating project only truly works at an individual level. Like Jubrān, he attempts to be simultaneously 'modern and classical, realist and mystical, nihilist and revolutionary.' But it is far easier to deconstruct than to reconstruct.

Adonis' ideal poet is like the Sufi perfect man, combination of madman and prophet, who harmonises both sides of existence and regains the lost unity of the original theomorphism, 'where the primeval and the cultural meet'... But since this meeting point, this *barzakh*, is never still, Adonis' world is inherently unstable. Such is his rejection of the *status quo*, he goes to the other extreme, verging on an esoteric fundamentalism. This represents an equal and opposite reaction of chaos to what he sees as the static nature of Arab civilization, which must be utterly destroyed and rebuilt. For Adonis, Arab reality requires this transitional madness if it is to maintain its own identity in a future world civilization. It is ultimately unclear, however, to what degree his esoterism springs from measured socio-cultural analysis rather than his own psychological inclinations.

For Adonis, mysticism is an aspiration towards the infinite and the unknown. This implies perpetual motion, rather than completion, which he aims to exemplify in the structure of his writing. This is why the *mandala* does not apply to Adonis in the same way as it does to al-Bayyātī and ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr: rather than trying to close the circle of psychological wholeness, he ultimately celebrates its perpetual openness – "The wound is what created me" – despite the obvious tension this creates. Closure, for one who believes in the infinite progression and beginning, is tantamount to rank traditionalism, imitation, death. However, his conviction that the

Sufis were aware of the exponential nature of their quest, whilst itself a creditable viewpoint, cannot escape the problems of relativism.

Such issues are part of his apparent pioneering of postmodern values in Arabic thought, although he consciously locates them in the depths of the Arabic heritage. Besides the emphasis on open-endedness, this postmodern esoterism includes his concept of *istiḡṣā'*, or infinite exploration; the absurdity of attempting to attain Truth; the principle of 'limitlessness in art'⁵¹⁷; and the Heraclitean notions of perpetual flux and relativity. There is a clear post-structuralist influence in his inclination for deconstruction and bringing marginal texts to the centre (c.f. Derrida); in tracing the archaeology of knowledge/power relationships in Arab-Islamic history, and deliberate use of the 'language of madness' to circumscribe them (c.f. Foucault); and in his use of ecstatic language (c.f. Barthes). His neo-Sufi inclinations are therefore a means to intellectual rebellion and cultural difference.

Adonis conceives of art as an expression of esoteric reality and of the artist as unifier of all levels of consciousness into one indivisible whole. For him, as for the Sufis, the source of creation lies in this unknown, divine dimension of existence. This accounts for the deliberate absurdity and obscurity of his work, both in terms of structure and content. Importantly, however, he does not self-consciously write 'Sufi poetry,' since he is not a Sufi and for him all true poetry needs no qualifying adjective. Such open-ended writing is by definition impossible to explain or translate in any conclusive way, and is open to as many interpretations as it has readers.

With this conception of artistic creation, all unconscious processes become keys to poetic imagination. The dream, for example, takes man to the *barzakh*, as does *fanā'* for the Sufis. From this viewpoint, immersion into esoteric chaos, inherently illogical and unpredictable, is the catalyst for the birth of a new order, if only in the poet's own self.

Despite his distinctive historical view of Sufism and inevitably selective use of the extensive Sufi sources, Adonis' *Sufism and Surrealism* remains a convincing argument for the esoteric viewpoint. In it, he demonstrates how Sufis achieved freedom on all levels of existence – love,

⁵¹⁷ Adonis, *al-Thābit wa al-Mutaḥawwil*, p. 179

knowledge, writing, etc. – through dialectical principles that connect them with other cultural movements. The result is a humanistic secular mysticism through which he aims to “obtain anew this union that we have lost since the fall.”

As such, Adonis unites two distinct but complementary viewpoints: mysticism and postmodernism. However enlightened or progressive, the problem is that neither truly solves the Arab world’s modern socio-political issues. To embrace a postmodern mysticism before the establishment of an authentic modernity and secular values inevitably entails the permanent exile that Adonis defiantly cherishes.

With the deconstruction-reconstruction dialectic Adonis attempts to transform existence and restore man to himself “through the return of his lost powers”. This is a rejection of externally imposed conditions and an attempt to return to the lost paradise. In this way his neo-Sufism comes across as an attempt to replicate the organic wholeness of childhood or the womb, reflecting the circularity of human consciousness. But the three main phases of Adonis’ life – childhood, ideological and neo-Sufi – should be seen not as discrete entities separated by sharp philosophical switches, but as an overlapping continuum. For example, aspects of SSNP ideology, such as rebirth and mythology, remain implicit within his subsequent esoterism. Of the two volumes discussed here, *Songs of Miḥyār the Damascene* (1961), standing on the cusp of this shift, carries a clearer socio-political message than the later *In Celebration of Things Obscure and Clear* (1988).

°Alī Aḥmad Sa‘īd is no ordinary poet. He could be seen as anything from a militant atheist to a progressive neo-Islamist philosopher: the difference between atheism and pantheism is essentially a matter of linguistics. To remain true to himself and the world, his thought purposely exemplifies the paradox of the super-rational simultaneity principle: exile is home, obscurity is clarity, madness is wisdom, death is life, chaos is order, betrayal is faith, flux is permanence, deviation is truth, scepticism is certainty, relativism is absolutism, contradiction is sense. Identity is not based on geography, but on liberty. As two sides of the same existential coin, these oppositions belie the existence of a unified divine Meaning. Sufism, the mystical path of self-knowledge in Islam, for him represents but one route towards total freedom and the affirmation of a simultaneously unique and universal identity.

CONCLUSION

Words in Arabic today
Are all blind
Except for one: God.⁵¹⁸

Comparative Analysis

The three case studies of this thesis have sought to illustrate and explain the broader trend of neo-Sufism after 1960, defining each poet as follows: al-Bayyātī: revolutionary mysticism, °Abd al-Şabūr: theistic existentialism, Adonis: total esoteric revolution. The clear variation in these poets' individual approaches, not only to ideological questions, but also to language, poetic creativity and ultimately in their use of Sufism, has necessitated a slightly different approach in each case. Nevertheless, there exist fundamental commonalities underlying these differences.

The variation in approach and methodology can be appreciated by examining each poet's use of al-Ḥallāj. °Abd al-Şabūr and al-Bayyātī conceive of this pivotal figure more as revolutionary hero than as Sufi saint, while for Adonis he is primarily a poet and heretic. Such a discrepancy reflects a fundamental split in the poets' approaches: the use of Sufi characters as masks or moral exemplars versus exploration of their creative and visionary potential. This, in turn, goes back to their alternative conceptions of the role and meaning of art, and ultimately to contrasting ontological viewpoints: for Adonis, creativity, which is simultaneously self-discovery and world-discovery, "is founded on the abyss of the Unlimited..."⁵¹⁹ It is, in other words, essentially no different to the Sufis' esoteric journey, an intrinsically personal and metaphysical view traceable to his early inculcation in Islamic mysticism. Whereas for him poetry entailed the discovery of the Unknown, those of a more directly committed persuasion attempted to fuse Sufism with a socialist ideal to express aspirations for truth and justice in the public sphere. Thus al-Ḥallāj effectively became a political mask in al-Bayyātī and °Abd al-Şabūr's existential struggles. The inner world was significant insofar as it affected the outer: mystic union was incomplete without perfecting the macrocosmic self, the achievement of social justice. Adonis, meanwhile, being

⁵¹⁸ Adonis, *Ihtifā'an bil-ashyā' al-ghāmiḍa al-wāḍiḥa*, p. 60

⁵¹⁹ Adonis, *al-Shi'riyya al-°Arabiyya*, (Dār al-Ādāb, Beirut, 1985), p. 105

more preoccupied with cultural renewal and innovation, gives ontological priority to the esoteric viewpoint in its own right. Despite their shared ultimate aim of changing reality, therefore, the fundamentally different approaches of these poets are reflected in their alternative uses of an archetypal symbol such as al-Ḥallāj.

However, this major difference belies several major commonalities regarding the motivation for neo-Sufism, which transcend the perennial debate over the role of art. These revolve around the effects of social, political and cultural reality on the psychological constitution of the individual. This conclusion will identify a generic, albeit necessarily flexible, neo-Sufi paradigm that reflects their attempts to cope with a common reality. Despite differing backgrounds, all three came to fully appreciate the connection between the cultural product of poetry and its inner esoteric inspiration. This relationship superseded ideological differences: indeed, the affinity between mysticism and poetic creativity represents a significant point of commonality for two poets, Adonis and ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, who were otherwise quite different.

The thesis has discussed the psychological conditions behind this neo-Sufi paradigm: fragmentation, disillusionment, exile, spiritual emptiness, loss, despair and existential angst. These in turn are directly related to external factors: lack of individual and cultural freedoms, the political repression and corruption of the post-colonial state, the country/city dialectic, social and economic issues in the urban reality. All modern Arab poets suffered from this predicament, albeit in differing ways; all were faced with the fundamental loss of wholeness and identity that simultaneously afflicted both nation and individual. Neo-Sufism can be considered but one among various interrelated psychological reactions to this fraught historical circumstance. It can be defined at once as a critique of modern Arab reality and an attempt to transcend it, a quest for cultural and artistic authenticity, an affirmation of the integrity of the individual in the context of mass ideologies and oppressive political orders, a will to freedom, an expression of the inherent affinities between ancient mysticism and postmodernist thought, a search for simultaneous microcosmic and macrocosmic wholeness that was encapsulated in the Andalusian ideal, and finally an expression of 'cultural individuation' in response to the angst-ridden *Zeitgeist*.

i) Cultural Authenticity: the Response to a Civilizational Crisis

Neo-Sufism can be viewed in light of the trend towards rejection of secular rationalism and the religious revival in and after the 1960s. Where Islamic nationalists after 1967 poured scorn on the secular pan-Arab doctrine and advocated a return to the 'pure' Islamic principles, the neo-Sufi poets had anticipated this development some years earlier by reviving Islam's esoteric tradition. However, while the neo-Sufi ideal contrasted strongly with its Islamist counterpart – the poets remained avowedly secular, for example – the themes and terminology used were often ambiguous. Sufism was a major part of all the poets' cultural background and spiritual heritage, Sunnī and °Alawī alike. Like the Islamists, the neo-Sufi poets came to reject the Nasserite project, whose defeat they effectively foresaw. Faced with this crisis, the approaches of °Abd al-Şabūr and the Islamist ideologue Sayyid Quṭb reveals some interesting parallels, such as the Kierkegaardian need for commitment to an irrational principle in response to state oppression, and the reinterpretation of ancient religious principles in an attempt to restore truth to the world. Adonis' attitude towards the Shi'ī revolution in Iran also reflects a dangerous ambiguity between the exoteric and esoteric movements.⁵²⁰ In both cases, the return to religious motifs can be considered symptomatic of a desire to re-establish universal principles like truth and justice in familiar and culturally legitimate terms. For the neo-Sufis, this entailed a return to the East after embracing European ideas, synthesizing the cultural 'other' of Western rationalism and the cultural 'self' of Eastern mysticism. By using Sufism, however, they effectively called into question the ability of reason and logic – the founding principles of the European Enlightenment – to foster an Arab-Islamic society that lives in truth.

The identity crisis of these poets revolves around a love-hate relationship with modernity, a double-edged sword that brings both emancipation from traditional structures and a renewed cultural and political vulnerability. Neo-Sufism, therefore, is simultaneously an impassioned restatement of the modernist ideal in art – the right to creative freedom – and a bitter rejection of the all-encompassing exoteric Order that modern secular reason paradoxically helps to maintain. If enlightenment reason locks society into a rigid system of logical oppositions that is always incipiently totalitarian, then the irrational chaos of the esoteric experience allows the artist to

⁵²⁰ Adonis, *al-Muḥīt al-Iswid*, (Dār al-Sāqī, Beirut, 2005) p. 108

perpetually renew it. It follows that neo-Sufism is both a rejection and continuation of the inherited culture, and its attitude towards the West, like that of the Islamist ideologues, is more complex than it first appears. To overcome the conflict between cultural authenticity and the acceptance of a cultural other whose own agenda deprives it of legitimacy, Adonis has repeatedly striven to distinguish between the colonial-ideological aspects of this other, which he spurns outright, and its spiritual-irrational aspects, which form the bridge to a common humanity. Indeed, he himself crossed this bridge twice: the outward journey to discover super-rational movements in European poetry and thought, such as Surrealism, and the return, armed with this knowledge, to rediscover the super-rational movements in Islamic thought, such as Sufism, and thence to equate the two as alternative approaches towards the same Absolute Truth. This cognitive dialectic of self-knowledge via the other is indeed the very essence of Sufism. Yet the fact that Adonis needed to express this universal human quest in culturally specific terms reveals the overriding importance of authenticity: postmodern irrationalism thereby appeared not as an import but as a renewal of original Eastern thought. This is despite the fact that his wholesale reinterpretation of Arabic letters can be very much attributed to his European experiences: “It was reading Baudelaire which changed my understanding of Abū Nuwās...and Mallarmé’s work which explained... the mysteries of Abū Tammām’s poetic language...”⁵²¹

In their self-conception as the visionary guides, even latter-day prophets, of the Arab nation, these poets reacted to the breakdown of Arab society and culture with a mixture of rejection and desperate desire for its rebirth. While the specifically non-Islamic fertility myths of the 1950s paradoxically expressed both of these, the subsequent return to Sufism was more in keeping with the mood of the following decade, in which any rebirth required at least a veneer of Islamic legitimacy. Al-Ḥallāj could be reclaimed not only as a poetic mask, but as a symbol of the true Islamic values: justice, equality and love. Whilst maintaining cultural legitimacy by using a figure from Islamic history, the poets thereby effectively continued the age-old struggle between the esoterists (Sufis) and exoterists (*‘ulamā’*) for the heart of the religion.

⁵²¹ Adonis, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, p. 81

ii) Individual versus Mass and the Will to Freedom

Neo-Sufism clearly internalised the search for truth that each poet had pursued in the political sphere. The structure of society under the secular state differed little from that under theocratic rule: for Adonis, whose interpretation of Sufism was strongly influenced by post-structuralist French thought, both entailed a moribund, static order functioning in the name of the meekly assenting masses. Disillusionment with the quest for a modern Utopia spawned a new kind of quest: for individual integrity in contradistinction to the mass. The failure of the outer revolutions in Iraq, Egypt and elsewhere led inevitably to an instinctive reassessment: real truth ultimately was hidden within the individual, “that infinitesimal unity on which a world depends”.⁵²² The Sufi God or Absolute became effectively synonymous with the total liberation of the individual in the face of repressive state systems and rigid cultural norms. Sufi characters were symbols of the will to freedom and individual wholeness, transcending external repression. As individual *par excellence*, the poet’s spiritual journey inevitably takes him beyond collective solutions. Living in truth required the remaking reality from within, so that external reality might become a function of inner truth. The neo-Sufi experience clearly charted such a shift from collective to individual: al-Bayyātī’s move from the virtuous city to the orchard of love, °Abd al-Şabūr’s gradual withdrawal from society and solitary attempts at Sufi-esque abstraction, Adonis’ nature mysticism and surrealist dream-journeys. Paradoxically, moreover, it was precisely through the profoundest individual experience that the poet hoped to return to his fellow men, as if going beyond the individual unconscious to the collective unconscious. “I spurn you so that I may know you”, says °Abd al-Şabūr, suggesting the ascent from *fanā*’ to *baqā*’.⁵²³

Freedom is among the Arab poet’s highest ideals. Through subordination to the abstract idea of the State, these poets were denied their individuality and therefore their deepest level of identity. They shared a common objection to the circular logic of God as Order (the religious experience being subordinated to a repressive, static, controlling institution) and Order as God (the contemporary political system elevated to the status of a divinely-sanctioned order, just as totalitarian and intransigent as the religious institution). Both involve a severe curtailment of individual freedom. To achieve freedom requires deconstructing this overarching Order through

⁵²² Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, p. 79

⁵²³ °Abd al-Şabūr, *Aqūlu Lakum*, p. 66

the opposing force of chaos, and reconstructing it in another form. But the annihilation of the individual ego within the all-encompassing system entailed precisely that: through totalitarianism, the individual had been unmade and could be remade, analogously to Sufi *fanā'* and *baqā'*. This mystical dialectic was the madman and the prophet remaking reality. Thus the language of Sufism offered the radical Arab poet a discourse through which to attempt his recreation of reality. Sufism was therefore a means of reasserting the primacy of the individual in the face of externally imposed mass ideas, as if the poet was reclaiming the State-imposed psychological annihilation to his advantage. If Sufi annihilation was merely the prelude to subsistence, then this formula could be restated in modern terms. However, language alone could not achieve this, and external reality needed more than poetry to undergo real change.

The will to individuality therefore deconstructs the exoteric institution. Naturally, individuality can be passed off as egotistic obstinacy by the purveyors of *'ilm*: science condemns it as subjectivism and religious authorities denounce it as heresy. Again, al-Ḥallāj represented an ideal here: expressing his individuality through being anchored in God, in contradistinction to the political reality. If the individual could not find his Truth, then society – which after all consists merely of individuals – would also fall short. The role of religion as a counterbalance to mass-mindedness is well attested: “the individual will never find the real justification for his existence, and his own spiritual and moral autonomy, anywhere except in an extramundane principle capable of relativizing the overpowering influence of external factors. The individual who is not anchored in God can offer no resistance on his own resources to the physical and moral blandishments of the world. For this he needs the evidence of inner, transcendent experience which alone can protect him from the otherwise inevitable submersion in the mass.”⁵²⁴

⁵²⁴ Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, p. 16

iii) Mysticism and Postmodernism

The neo-Sufi trend stands at the intersection of two concepts, mysticism and postmodernism, simultaneously exhibiting characteristics of both. As a reformulation of the timeless principles of Sufism in the light of modern knowledge, it represents, particularly in Adonis' case, an authentically and specifically Arab postmodernism. Mysticism and postmodernism share several attributes: both are irrational ideas that break through the restraints imposed by scientific or theological rationalism (*'ilm*). They disturb the rational philosopher no less than the theologian. The unitive experience of mysticism, where conceptual opposites are reconciled and the cause-effect binary transcended, is perfectly symbolised by the unity of the *mandala* and philosophically equivalent to postmodern suspension of the rational. As established previously, there is a clear parallel between "deconstruction" and mystical annihilation (*fanā'*): reality implodes and attains zero dimensions at the Sufi *barzakh*. Sufism, therefore, inherently deconstructs present reality and effectively subverts the logical, ethical and political norms that exercise social control. Adonis in particular emphasizes this revolutionary potential, whereby the division between personal and political is revealed to be a cultural construct. Like postmodernism, Sufism thereby criticizes the unhealthy alliance between discourse and power, in favour of the "mad", the marginalised, and the minority. The true mystic is a perpetual outsider who by definition questions orthodoxy. It is in this vein that Adonis attempts to undermine the monolithic – or "logocentric" – axis of Arabic culture.

Adonis tells us that, "I write in a language that exiles me."⁵²⁵ Both postmodernism and mysticism are inherently sceptical of language and external reality, viewing them as a form of unreality and revealing their impotent exile from truth. For both the concept of 'normality' or 'reality' is fraught with difficulties and cannot be sharply defined. Everything is a metaphor for an abyss, whether the latter be divine or not. In this, they hint at the falseness of the 'real', i.e. exoteric world of culture, inhabited by constructed selves or 'subjects'/egos which in Sufism are exchanged for the natural, organic, divine Other. Both therefore imply that humans lack genuine individuality and exist merely as a function of a larger system or Being. This also reveals their

⁵²⁵ Adonis, *Transformations of the Lover*, p. xiii

common ethical ambiguity, beyond the diametric polarities of conventional morality. All that remains outside is power; all that remains inside is the quest for wholeness.

Neo-Sufism and postmodernism, both of which are profoundly indebted to Nietzsche, reaffirm the precedence of the subjective in human experience in contrast to the false objectivities of the rational institution. The prophetic spirit in art eschews objective relationships in favour of the dark chaos of subjectivisms. It is as if man can only attain ultimate objectivity through the pursuit of his own subjectivity. The ancient man and the hypothetical future man unite origin and end in a circular totality, the *mandala* of the Anthropos. Just as the pre-modern poets possessed prophetic powers, so in postmodernity the distinction between poet and philosopher is blurred. The distinction between epistemological fields demarcated by modern thought become once more immaterial: the snake's tail reaches its mouth.

Furthermore, mysticism and postmodernism share an ateleological existential viewpoint: death as mere transition in esoteric religions, lack of closure in postmodern relativism. For Adonis, following al-Niffarī, meaning arises not in reaching a destination, but through the constant journey, which in itself is what sustains vitality and prevents fossilization. These endless experiences, however, inevitably entail relativism. The natural tendencies of the unconscious mind incline towards mystical ideas, or the relativity of existence around an Unseen Absolute. The fact that good and evil function concurrently creates a moral conflict for the exoteric believer. Freedom from opposites, achieved through mystical experiences, offers a resolution to this conflict. The "eastern relativity of good and evil" implies liberation from the moral opposites that so tormented °Abd al-Şabūr.

The global religious revival accompanying the decline of Enlightenment rationalism, with the spread of new-age spiritualities and the rise of radical fundamentalisms, is a postmodern phenomenon in whose context neo-Sufism may be viewed. By proclaiming the end of progress, postmodernism has provided fertile soil for "fundamentalist" ideologies, but it has also relativized their claim to absolute truth. If political Islamism offered a potential means to preserve distinctive identity in the face of modernity and secularisation, then neo-Sufism also attempted to rediscover culturally authentic meaning. These were Kierkegaardian attempts to restore meaning to a world in which science cannot offer the same psychological underpinning as

age-old irrational beliefs. Like European postmodernists, the neo-Sufis were disillusioned, often pessimistic, erstwhile leftist thinkers whose revolutionary aspirations remained unfulfilled and who were critical of the public functions of reason. However, neo-Sufi postmodernism naturally displayed unique and distinctive characteristics; the postmodernism of ‘the other’ was inevitably different from that of the European ‘self’. The fact that these poets were heirs to both European and Arab-Islamic thought engendered an intellectual hybridity that continued and transcended both traditions. Where the Europeans followed the exoteric rationalist mould by denying the noumenal realm, the neo-Sufi postmodernists, particularly Adonis, vehemently affirmed it. While for the European relativists human identity was effectively a fiction and the *mandala* a black hole, the Arab poets maintained that the creative self lies beyond the ego. They could not accept that language entirely constitutes reality.

Moreover, effective action for change requires more than mere deconstruction of logical opposites. It implies the need for reconstruction in altered form, just as *fanā’* leads to *baqā’*, the prophetic revolution. Indeed, mere annihilation without subsistence could be seen as disengaged, solipsistic and irresponsible by the committed Arab poet. °Abd al-Şabūr and al-Bayyātī particularly encountered the major ontological dilemma between the abstraction and introversion of the poetic ideal and the perennial issue of external responsibility. Words are exiled from truth, but still necessary for socio-political interaction. Hence the need for a prophetic level of consciousness in which words and truth are united, although this forever remains a mirage.

Naturally, the Arab poet needs psychological strength in contrast to the endless slippage of relativism. Through mystical inclinations the notion of a central axis, or God, reappears, around which all else has relative value, like ibn al-°Arabī’s “secondary causes”. Psychological fragmentation can only be overcome by absolute wholeness. In the case of °Abd al-Şabūr and al-Bayyātī, this wholeness becomes the ultimate goal; Adonis’, conversely, celebrates the endless Heraclitean flux and a relativism he attributes not to European thinkers but to the wandering Sufi dervish al-Niffarī, who represents for him the apotheosis of poetic modernism. Aware that the circle cannot be definitively closed, he rejoices in openness. A closed epistemological system is precisely what creates a moribund culture and external oppression. Against this he posits an ateleological, postmodernist flux in which uncertainty is a virtue:

The fence that protected him
Is the wall that besieged him.⁵²⁶

Yet Adonis fluctuates between desire for the Absolute and acceptance of the relative. While he acknowledges that the Absolute cannot be reached, he still maintains that Sufi writing is “a symbol that transcends the relative to the Absolute”⁵²⁷, a return to the collective unconscious. In his profoundly mystical 1988 volume this conflict pushes him towards paradoxically suggesting the absolute truth of relativism. Adonis’ interpretation of Sufism was strongly influenced by the European theoretical milieu. Like al-Niffarī, his poetry gradually dissolves into unclassifiable fragments, affirming the postmodern/mystical breakdown of conceptual boundaries:

Yes, light prostrates itself
But only to another light...

Thirsty
But I can only be quenched
By an inaccessible water.⁵²⁸

Adonis’ concept of poetic creativity as analogous to the esoteric journey towards the creation of a utopian future betrays his oscillation between triumphant absolutism and desperate relativism:

It is poetry that declares the death of all that kills man. It does not thereby only kill the gods, but also all that tries to take their place... be it a political power, a system or an ideology. That is why revolutionary poetry orients itself towards the future and remains a dream of something which poetry alone cannot realize: its realization needs all of history as comprehensive movement and complete progress. That is why poetry, by itself, may seem never able to realize this dream. Revolutionary poetry is like a movement, always renewing itself, but always failing. Yet, its effectiveness lies in this very failure, in this constant surpassing, and in this horizon that always leads to another horizon.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁶ Adonis, *Ihtifā’an bil-ashyā’ al-ghāmiḍa al-wāḍiḥa*, p. 12

⁵²⁷ Adonis, *al-Ṣūfiyya wa al-Sūryāliyya*, p. 156

⁵²⁸ Adonis, *Ihtifā’an bil-ashyā’ al-ghāmiḍa al-wāḍiḥa*, p. 26

⁵²⁹ Adonis, *Zamān al-Shi’r*, quoted in Khairallah, ‘Adūnīs and the Quest for a New God’

iv) The Granada Paradigm

As previously established, the impetus for a mystical journey is provided by an acutely modern sense of loss, which the modern Arab poet suffers on a number of levels: loss of the organic psychic wholeness of the womb, of childhood innocence, of epistemological certainty, of cultural innocence, of a spiritual (and often physical) home, of the historical pre-eminence of the Arabs. The mythical fall of Adam, which equates unconscious childhood with paradise and presents the dawn of consciousness as a curse, functions as a metaphor for all of these. Restoring the paradise lost is the ultimate existential journey. At a civilizational level, the yearning for rebirth is encapsulated in the idea of Arab Andalus, the medieval Umayyad caliphate in Spain. For Adonis, it is a symbol of hope and honour, and the prototype of the perfect society of the future, for al-Bayyātī, it epitomizes the Arabs' unique contributions to world civilization.

For these poets Andalus was *al-mujtama' al-kāmil*, the perfect society, embodying the progressive principles of multiplicity in unity, or harmony in difference, which are integral motifs in Sufī thought. Ibn al-ʿArabī himself, *al-Sheikh al-Akbar* of Sufism, and other great thinkers such as ibn Rushd, contributed to its outstanding philosophical and mystical achievements. According to Adonis, Andalus was a human mosaic, "a hybridization of the world in form as well as in essence". By transcending all individual cultures, it created a new and qualitatively different crossbreed culture. He attributes to it the progressive ideas of overcoming geographical boundaries and creating the open space of freedom. Al-Bayyātī, similarly, came to idealise the plural nature of medieval Granada. Site of the illustrious Alhambra palace, it fulfils his recurring motif of the perfect city that must somehow be regained:

Which of us plays melodies beneath the Arabic balconies of Granada, weeping for love or a lover, wandering down alleyways in the drunken desolation of one who must leave or stay, one who begins or ends his journey, saying farewell to the Alhambra's minarets, circling alone around God and His earthly abodes... I cry out at the climax: which of us, oh Granada, has betrayed the agony of the poets and sold the food of the poor? ... Still the woman weeps in her eternal exile, and in the Alhambra the fountain weeps too.⁵³⁰

⁵³⁰ Al-Bayyātī, 'An-Nūr yā'tī min Ghamāṭa', in *Ḥubb wa Mawt wa Nafy*, pp. 210

Adonis' very latest volume (2003) expresses this vision of Granada:

Listen, oh poet, to Granada
 You only loved the evening past
 Because you were taken by the morning to come.
 Night foretells the dawn –
 Like a root that the horizon opens for you
 And a depth that nourishes you with transcendence.
 Like the sun, and like Granada, you have
 Two cheeks:
 One in the East,
 And one in the West.⁵³¹

For Adonis, identity is not fixed, but an open-ended horizon, irrepressibly flowing beyond geographical or social limits. He locates the seeds of this idea firstly in the deep resources of the Arab poetic imagination, which overlaps with Sufi thought, and secondly in the cultural and political milieu of Umayyad Andalus, His search for the culture of the future is directly inspired by his immersion in Sufism, in which, he says,

... there exists a notion that revolves around the notion of the perfect human being who nonetheless remains capable of even greater perfection – like a universe with no end to it. This perfect human being is universal is as far as he transcends his particular affiliation to become a new and Other human being: he is the quintessence of both aspects of the universe, the visible as well as the invisible but whose identity is the universe in its entirety. In a culture that transcends cultures lies that which prepares for the coming of this perfect human, the human of the future.⁵³²

Adonis thereby affirms that the democratic ideal is implicit within Arab Sufi thought. To maintain internal consistency, his 'total esoteric revolution' must function on all levels: linguistically, since changing reality requires changing the means of expression; romantically, since love leads the self towards completion and liberation; epistemologically, since the mystic searches continually for the unknown. But it must also function on the most macrocosmic level:

⁵³¹ Adonis, 'Ithnā ʿAshar Qindīlan li-Gharnāṭa', in *Tanabbu' ayyuhā al-A'mā*, (Dār al-Sāqī, London, 2003)

⁵³² Adonis, from a speech delivered at Dartmouth College, 19th May 2001.

the global, or civilizational, which is represented by the Andalusian model. Fundamentally, his entire project is a civilizational critique from within, tracing how Islamic civilization has reached its present state and presenting a potential future based on Andalusian values. This provides a sense of historical continuity and legitimacy for his outlook on international relations. His belief in a unified world, where differences exist not in kind but in degree, can be traced to Sufi values such as ibn al-ʿArabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd* (ontological monism) and therefore to Andalus.

With the complex relation between order and chaos, it seems the perfect democracy would be an institutionalized anarchy. This putative perfect society, or culture of the future, may be impossible, but it nevertheless remains the poet's goal. The existentialist dimension in Sufism implies this through the "death in life" of *fanā'*: man only enjoys perfection before birth and after death, i.e. in unconsciousness. Everything in between is equivalent to the Adamic fall, which is overcome in *fanā'*. However, the flower of the Andalusian seed, argues Adonis, can today be seen in the idea that human culture penetrates the false segregation of political frontiers. Through exilic experiences, which by their very existence undermine the idea of an art imprisoned within national or ideological boundaries, poetry can "assume a universal scope without detaching itself from its linguistic, civilizational, or human origins." It can therefore simultaneously attain both specificity and universality, like the Sufi perfect man. The neo-Sufi development, in other words, is intimately related to the advance of an alternative, humanistic globalism to counterbalance the dominant politico-economic globalism.

In the Arab poetic imagination, then, Andalus is the nucleus of modernity, incorporating the cultural other within the self. Likewise, the plural and interexistent culture of the future will define identity through diversity rather than homogeneity. Otherness must be "an organic and constituent" component, through which this culture finds its own self, rejecting simplistic divisions between "East" and "West". But just as this picture of the original Andalus is an idealised historical vision, so this future utopia perpetually proved a mirage. As a younger adult, each poet aimed to help create *al-mujtama' al-kāmil* through new ideas such as nationalism and communism. But as Arab reality continued to deteriorate and collective perfection remained a mere dream, the shortcomings of such systems became clear: they betrayed man's uniqueness and right to freedom. Imposing the vision of perfection externally was a contradiction in terms: abandoning the just means betrays the end *a priori*. Whatever the beauty of the inner vision, Arab

reality proved a constant source of disillusion. As al-Bayyātī's case so poignantly portrays, this promised land, the lost self of the Arab nation, stood beyond an infinite ocean, leaving him broken at the seven gates of the world. In his role as *prophet*, the modern Arab poet would remain a tragic, heroic failure, washed up on distant shores. Exile and wandering are his destiny; his modern Granada (whether envisioned as Thebes, Nishapur, Shiraz, etc) remained conspicuously absent.

If the dream of collective perfection, the future Andalus, remained just that, then the poet was left with little option but to internalise the quest. In despair at the failure to create a socio-political utopia, consolation could be sought in what Adonis tellingly called "the inner Andalus,"⁵³³ i.e. individual wholeness. Hence the shift in al-Bayyātī's search from the city of God to the romantic Absolute, 'Ā'isha – the psychological "twin of Sufism" – and his "religion of love". The collective yields to the individual. This too explains Adonis' conflation of love poetry with his quest for the esoteric Absolute: both involve the return of the split self to itself. The image of the "inner Andalus", a universal *mandala* symbol of Arab consciousness, powerfully combines the collective and the individual in a unified archetype, definitive of the poet's endless quest. It effectively elevates the Arab nation's quest for its lost self to a mystical level. The search for the civilization of the future, which carried on regardless, thereby takes on a more transcendental, mythical dimension. The journey must be perpetually undertaken in the microcosmic and macrocosmic selves, although neither will ever be complete. When the poet realises that change begins not with mass organization or collective solutions, but within the individual self, the neo-Sufi quest for unitive fulfilment comes into its own. The "inner Andalus" is "an ocean without shores",⁵³⁴ the infinity of the unconscious, in which he must forever sail:

I plunge into the ashes of the horizons
 To the dark islands of the known unknown
 Through the commotion of the waves, the gentle wind takes me
 In the last remnants of the night
 The wind's offerings come to me
 And the tumultuous troughs hurl my anchor...

⁵³³ Khairallah, 'The Greek Cultural Heritage and the Odyssey of Modern Arab Poets', p. 56

⁵³⁴ Ibid. p. 59

From behind the darkness a voice
Stuns me, repeating its heartfelt echo:
“Offer your sacrifice to the angry sea,
Offer your sacrifice to the angry sea,
Offer your sacrifice...”⁵³⁵

⁵³⁵ °Abd al-Şabūr, ‘al-Ibḥār fī al-Dhākira’, in *Al-A‘māl al-Kāmila*, pp. 51-2

v) The *Metanoia* and Cultural Individuation

Neo-Sufism may also be seen as a *metanoia*, or rebirth of the spirit, a compensatory movement of the unconscious in response to the one-sided spirit of the age. This Jungian term refers to the hypothesis that “any deficiency in consciousness – such as exaggeration, one-sidedness, or lack of a function – is suitably supplemented by an unconscious process”.⁵³⁶ On a civilizational level, these poets were subversive elements, perpetrators of Nietzschean chaos, engaged in a prophetic mission to restore the lost balance of a civilization that had erred towards excessively exoteric order and institutionalisation. It had fallen out of touch with the primary truth. When a society deviates too far from its instinctual foundations, causing friction between conscious and unconscious, it is perhaps inevitable that the collective unconscious will redress this imbalance. Such is the function of the poet in the Nietzschean or Heideggerian mould, who is most sensitive to the needs of the age and must sacrifice his own happiness and security to undermine the static order. Even if Adonis undertook this mission in an extreme fashion, making many enemies in the process, there is an internal logic to the compensatory movement. It is an attempt of that civilization to maintain its original dynamism and character for the future, and thus stay faithful to itself. This opposition inevitably creates conflict, since static forces will protect their own interests. Every nation must constantly renew itself.

This is, of course, an essentially prophetic mission to rescue a society from perhaps its greatest danger: the loss of roots, losing touch with the spirit of its past and therefore the vitality of its future. The breakdown of a moribund religious tradition will always provoke instinctive reactionary responses, such as those seen in Egypt in 1967. Yet this cure, retreating into what is known and familiar, only worsens the illness and perpetuates the potential for psychic injury on a mass scale. If the conscious mind is severed from its instinctual basis, the imbalance is increased. However, the breakdown will also provoke genuine forces of renewal, who seek to revive not the outer actions of the golden age, but its dynamic spirit and genius. It is also worth noting Jung’s observation that the unconscious *Zeitgeist* not only compensates the attitude of the conscious mind but also anticipates changes to come. Egypt’s defeat in 1967 is a case in point. The nightmarish experiences suffered by neo-Sufi poets on a personal level, such as in ‘Abd al-

⁵³⁶ Jung, *Essays on Contemporary Events*, p. 2

Ṣabūr's *Meditations on a Wounded Age* were effects of the fragmented reality. By deconstructing the inherited truths through his art, this poet in fact spoke with the voice of millions, effectively foretelling that fateful day of reckoning and the radical changes that would follow it.

Neo-Sufi poetry is replete with irrational motifs: dreams, mystical states, erotic ecstasy, myth, madness, etc. Such eclipses in consciousness are all expressions of an esoteric response to the conscious attitude of the day, attempting to restore a dangerous state of consciousness towards equilibrium. Individually, they might themselves appear dangerous, extreme and atavistic, but only in geographical and temporal context can their deeper significance be appreciated. These manifestations of the collective unconscious also reflect the internalisation of the aspiration towards radical political change: disillusioned with the notion of collective ideas, which are always incipiently oppressive, the poet turns increasingly towards expressions of inner psychological truth. Of these, the myth is perhaps the most significant in the context of the *metanoia*. For Jung, myths are "original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings..." A nation's mythology "is its living religion, whose loss is always and everywhere... a moral catastrophe".⁵³⁷ Without its mythological heritage, the nation's psychic life falls into decay, like a man without a soul. As noted previously, the Arab responses to the encroachment of modern science and the disintegration of its central mythological symbol at first assumed a non-Islamic character (al-Ba^ʿth, Arab nationalism, the SSNP, the Tammūzī movement), but subsequently resumed an Islamic colouring. Despite the failure of these secular restorative movements, the neo-Sufi poets still carried the psychological burden of the nation on their shoulders. By assisting – inadvertently or otherwise – the revival of a religious mythology they helped to restore a semblance of psychological equilibrium that the secular movements could not offer. Religion being a vital link with psychic processes beyond the limited remit of consciousness, the rebirth of the spirit was an instinctive reaction. Furthermore, this was perhaps a necessary reaction, since in order to participate in the formation of a new, globalised culture, the Arab nation first needed to re-establish the myth upon which its own culture stood. To be a genuine part of this hypothetical future culture, each nation needs to continually rediscover its own myths and historical memory. Faced with the question of a meaningful role in global civilization and cultural production

⁵³⁷ Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 154

without sacrificing its own identity, the Arab nation required what could be called a process of 'cultural individuation': discovering the cultural other and assimilating it into a new, more global version of its own original myth. Such a process is inevitably prone to dangerous misinterpretations, but the neo-Sufi movement implied its necessity nonetheless, since no culture can properly exist without a meaningful connection to its past.

Stages on Life's Way

It is now possible to circumscribe the psychological journey of neo-Sufism with greater certainty. The trans-regional model discussed below makes no claim to be definitive or comprehensive, and should be interpreted flexibly according to each case. It describes not the rigid characteristics, but merely 'family resemblances,' of the three fairly distinct, yet continuous, phases in the life of the neo-Sufi Arab intellectual. Some aspects are universal reactions to the wider context of modernity; others are specific to the Arab case. The boundaries between each stage are never utterly distinct, although they often relate to particular historical landmarks or phases. This model will help to contextualise the neo-Sufi development both politically and psychologically.

i) Stage 1: Pre-modern

The first stage of the poet's development is primarily characterised by the innocence and organic psychic wholeness of youth, usually in a rural setting. The immediate environment can be defined as traditional and religious, often incorporating aspects of popular religion and mysticism. Sufism was an integral part of these poets' early experiences: al-Bayyātī grew up near the great Sufi master °Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī's tomb⁵³⁸, °Abd al-Ṣabūr was influenced by local holy men in his rustic youth, while Adonis' early schooling in Sufism and Shī'ism is well established. Sufism was therefore ingrained in the poet's unconscious during childhood – when the deepest levels of his identity are established – and remained dormant while other experiences and ideas took over. This early mystical worldview foretold later forays into romantic poetry. At this stage, prior to awareness of the presence of the other, his cultural orientation remained essentially inward and his intimate relationship with mother Earth remained unbroken. As Adonis says, recollecting his early youth: "I used to press my body to the earth, and roll in the grass..."⁵³⁹

This pious upbringing was consistent with the age-old traditions of rural social settings. The poet was generally inculcated into Arab-Islamic values, worldview and life, in which the transcendent, institutional conception of God remained dominant. It was this that the poet would fundamentally reject.

⁵³⁸ Al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī al-Shi'riyya*, pp. 22-3

⁵³⁹ Banipal Magazine 2 (June 1998), p. 31

ii) Stage 2: Modern

The striking characteristics of the second, modern stage are its relative brevity and state of crisis. As a young adult the poet's inward orientation inverts as he enters the orbit of the cultural other. Consequently, his loyalty to traditional and religious values comes under unbearable strain. The youthful innocence and naivety is now left behind. A schism appears in the poet's being: between two cultural poles, the integrity of the self is torn apart. This incipient dualism triggers an identity crisis, since he is attracted by what are deemed 'foreign' ideas. These ideas are expressly *anti-Islamic*: they reject the transcendental, advocating a separation between the public and the private; they either originate from or are oriented towards the secular rational West; they are the hopeful answers for a Godless world. Replacing the lost tradition, the new, secular faiths save the poet from a psychological abyss: for al-Bayyātī, Communism, for Adonis, the SSNP. Honestly striving to "live in truth" and socio-political justice, the young poet enthusiastically supports these radical ideologies.

The meeting of the young Arab intellectual with modernity causes a split between cultural loyalty and their progressive call for change. Their adoption of new ideologies is borne of the realisation that the Arab nation is technologically and scientifically underdeveloped – a fact brought home by military defeats – and politically repressive – a fact brought home by censorship, lack of public freedoms and ailing civil societies. On an intellectual level, these poets have a generally positive and inquisitive attitude towards the west, whilst rejecting its imperialist tendencies. However, critics dismiss their calls for change as defeatist submission and cultural betrayal, thus increasing their psychological turmoil. Adonis even claims to have been accused of being a foreign agent on account of his radicalism.⁵⁴⁰

As discussed in the introduction, the effects of these social, political, economic and cultural conditions are alienation and despair. Both physically and psychologically, the organic relationship with the land is broken, either by relocation to an urban milieu, by imprisonment for political subversion, or most emphatically by enforced exile. The meaninglessness and confusion

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 36

of identity in a Darwinian world, coupled with religious scepticism and disaffection with the city, inevitably provoke deep questioning, and the poet comes to admire the European existentialist tradition. Al-Bayyātī read Camus and Sartre, as well as Marx. Chapter 3 noted ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr’s similarity to Kierkegaard. However, the central figure was undoubtedly Nietzsche, who, along with Jubrān, can be seen as the “proto-neo-Sufi”. Each poet identified profoundly with Nietzsche’s Zarathustrian experience, which provided direct inspiration for his neo-Sufism. Adonis’ indebtedness to Nietzsche is matched by ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr’s intoxication at reading *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: “What spirit-wrenching vertigo I felt upon reading that book. Few books in the history of man can leave such an impression on the soul, and few philosophers can have such an impact on the human psyche as Nietzsche does. Those who do colour their philosophy with poetry, and dip their quill into the blood of the heart... It was as if [Nietzsche] was giving a noble answer to the lacking of his age.”⁵⁴¹

Total psychological crisis can be temporarily averted, of course, through commitment to an ideological cause, which the poet believes will create a better future collectively and personally. In the absence of the transcendental God, the ideological becomes almost divine, exchanging one exoterism for another. Al-Bayyātī was the politically committed poet *par excellence*, even subordinating artistic integrity to the struggle of the masses. ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr’s profound social conscience was very clear, especially early on, although like other poets of the 1960s generation he soon became disillusioned with Marxism. Adonis’ commitment was characteristically different: subtler, more ambiguous, more culturally oriented, already more internal.

So long as the dedication to a collective idea persists, the poet remains shielded from immediate religious experience. However, in a relatively brief period, approximately from the early 1950s to the early 1960s, the commitments of younger adulthood turn to dust. The individual poet is frustrated and betrayed by events beyond his control: the revolutions have given way to oppression, reviving the old ills in altered form. The psychological crisis can now no longer be averted. In Sufi terms, this culminates in an involuntary *fanā’*, or deconstruction of ego-consciousness, between the cultural I and the cultural Other. It is hardly surprising that the Nietzschean themes of madness, chaos and darkness are prominent in the poetry of this period.

⁵⁴¹ Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr, *Ḥayātī fī al-Shi‘r*, pp. 40-42

Not only does the Arab poet suffer the universal condition of modernity, the age of the spiritual orphan, but he suffers it in his own culturally specific and particularly harrowing form. By the early/mid-1960s, he has reached a midlife tipping point, when the second half of life begins and he is closer to death than birth. The political crisis is therefore also an existential crisis, whereby the individual becomes far more conscious of his mortality and so many cherished values no longer hold true: “what was great in the morning will be little at evening”.⁵⁴² At this phase in life, around 35 to 40, when mental depression among men is relatively common, a significant change is in the making. Such a change purportedly rises from the unconscious, bringing back to light certain traits which had disappeared in childhood.⁵⁴³

Thus begins another transition, in many ways the opposite of the first. The poet has read so much philosophy, learnt so much about the world, but it only seems to have increased his perplexity and anxiety. His learning has only led to total estrangement from his instincts. Despite his great intelligence and learning, his neurosis gradually overpowers him and undermines his morale. The separation from his ‘true’ self, brought about by his immersion in rational thought and civilization, plunges him into a conflict between conscious and unconscious, between knowledge and faith. His adopted *Weltanschauung*, with its rational and intellectual basis, is no defence against this demoralizing neurosis and alienation; indeed, it only makes it worse. It seems unsurprising that when his cherished convictions fail him man resorts to his childhood religion in the hope of finding relief.

Not only this, but the poet is increasingly aware that the ‘change’ brought about by radical mass movements, with their violence and propaganda, cannot save him from such a predicament. These movements are as much the problem as the solution. He is now aware that society should only exist for the individual, the natural carrier of life, and not *vice versa*. Real change is that within the individual psyche, a change in outlook and values, and only through accumulation of these will collective change really occur. Progress means nothing if man achieves it as a mere fragment of himself. This is a postmodern kind of despair, a rejection of the powers of reason. It is a function of the general psychic disturbance resulting from the fact that a natural human function is denied expression: the neuroticizing of modern man in the age of reason. He

⁵⁴² Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 111

⁵⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 107

desperately wants to overcome the dissociation of personality, integrating two back into one and thus regaining his certainty and direction. As Jung notes,

Such dissociations come about because of various incompatibilities; for instance, a man's present state may have come into conflict with his childhood state, or he may have violently sundered himself from his original character in the interests of some arbitrary persona more in keeping with his ambitions. He has thus become unchildlike and artificial, and has lost his roots. All this presents a favourable opportunity for an equally vehement confrontation with the primary truth.⁵⁴⁴

The individual is suffering from the 'disease of poets': oversensitivity to the imbalance of the age, the exoteric *Zeitgeist*. As an artist, his life is inevitably torn between two contradictory forces. The longing for happiness and security competes directly with his creative instinct and the prophetic mission to rebuild his nation. Thus the scene is set for a tragic outcome: the individual life sacrificed at the altar of the divine creative fire. His conscious life lies at the mercy of the powerful forces of unconscious life, which overwhelm him. But this psychological disintegration is offset by an (almost miraculous) compensatory operation which arises from this same unconscious, the symbols of which – such as the *qutb* or the orchard – suggest a process of centring. The poet is in the process of a rebirth into a strengthened sense of selfhood that may only be achieved through the very disintegration he has suffered. The traumatic denial of individual personality paradoxically appears to contribute to the development of a universal personality. Whatever the mystic loses in *fanā'*, he gains infinitely more in *baqā'*: "I become connected to nothing, to be the axis of everything." It is as if to reach the heights, he had as an indispensable precondition to plumb the darkest depths. Others might avoid the dangers of this enforced descent, but lose thereby its benefits.

iii) Stage 3: Postmodern

The third stage of the neo-Sufi model sees an attempt to synthesize the previous two stages and reconcile their diametrically opposed perspectives. The poet transcends the Western rational viewpoint and embraces the fundamentally irrational nature of existence. Through various motifs and techniques, his poetry attempts to return to the psychic unity of childhood. This is to some

⁵⁴⁴ Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 162

extent successful, but in the endless, open-ended and perpetually changing cosmos, absolute perfection will always elude him. Prior to death, he will never fully regain his loss. He must therefore “die in order to live”, as the Sufis say: the involuntary *fanā'*, or death in life, of the critical modern period must be sublimated into the renewed and strengthened selfhood, *baqā'*, the prophetic level of consciousness, “subsistence in God”. Adonis' entire project was self-confessedly prophetic:

Death is our destiny;
 we have seen the shores of despair
 and are reconciled to its cruel, icy sea.
 We shall cross that sea, right to its end,
 we shall go on, and pay no heed to that God;
 we long for a new god.⁵⁴⁵

Baqā', the final stage of the Sufi path, is a reinforced psychic wholeness, in which opposites reappear and man acquires divine attributes. Like the postmodern, it is a state of transcendent consciousness, qualitatively different again from the original innocence. In Jungian terms, this is the level of the collective unconscious, which affords a universal perspective analogous to the notion of prophetic consciousness. The poet now knows that his individual self is but a microcosm of the greater, macrocosmic self, and the two cannot be definitively separated. He must strive for perfection of both, even if this entails perpetual failure.

Having engaged with modernity, and to a large extent rejected it, the poet emerges more aware of his place in the world. Knowing the self means reconciliation with the other: they are two sides of a universal whole. In political terms, however, each contributes to his internal and external exile. Although he feels a renewed sense of belonging to his own culture, he nevertheless inhabits the strange no-man's-land of permanent exile, beyond the scope of geographical definition. In fact, his exile, or *hijra*, becomes an integral part of his identity. This idea takes him all the way back to Muḥammad, the original Sufi *insān kāmil*, whose revelations also began at the critical midpoint in life. The Prophetic paradigm of meditative withdrawal from society in order to reform resonates with the radical poet in flight from a corrupt order.

⁵⁴⁵ Adonis, 'al-Nūḥ al-Jadīd', in *Aghānī Mihyār al-Dimashqī*, p. 180

As the poet reaches a more universal level, cultural and political boundaries become to some degree obsolete, but they can never disappear. Throughout Adonis' outward orientation, there always remained a deeper current committed to the cultural self. Whatever the extent of cultural assimilation or borrowing, these poets remained defiantly Arab. Their frame of reference, since their youth, had always been the Arab-Islamic world rather than the West; the latter provided not a new home but merely a means of cultural self-knowledge.

The postmodern stage sees the return of the divine: man cannot ultimately escape from an Absolute idea. Destruction of the gods only puts others in their place, since the religious impulse is an instinctive human function. Some principle inevitably functions absolutely, even if that principle is relativism. It is not a question of absolutism or relativism, but absolutism *and* relativism. The poet's quest for truth is couched in explicitly more religious themes and terminology. However, unlike his Islamist counterparts, he does not attempt to restore the transcendent God. He revives the esoteric conception of the Divinity that is an integral, if less prominent, part of Islam. For him, God is no longer patriarch or ideology as in the previous stages (exoteric), but is now synonymous with the complete self (esoteric). Like the unconscious, the divine is an absence, a perpetual unknown. His poetry now reveals prophetic overtones, involving religio-political notions such as the *quṭb*.

It follows that, rather than Western thinkers, the great mystics of the poet's own cultural-spiritual heritage – ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Ḥallāj, al-Niffarī and others – come to prominence. The poet realises that his worldview after his journey through modern European thought is effectively identical to ibn al-ʿArabī's principle of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, or ontological monism. However, since he is now functioning on a more universal human level, the Western thinkers are not discarded but internalised and adapted towards more culturally specific ideas: Nietzsche's irrationalist inclinations, prophetic tones and poetic madness remain influential, while his *Überman* finds a ready-made equivalent in the much older Sufī concept of *al-insān al-kāmil* (both being expressions of the Anthropos archetype). Revolution, egalitarianism and social justice are no longer Marxist ideals, but the preserve of early Islamic figures, whether specifically Sufī or otherwise, such as al-Ḥallāj, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī or Muḥammad himself. The existentialist philosophers also relate back to figures such as ʿUmar al-Khayyām. Similarly, the ambiguity of

the earlier themes such as madness, chaos and darkness renders them still useful poetic tools: they represent the destruction that paves the way for reconstruction. This inversion of values is consistent with the contradictory effects of the reconciliation of opposites in the esoteric experience. Adonis, for one, attempts to embody this synthesis: he is both a committed modernist and progressive radical on one level, and a committed traditionalist and trenchant conservative on another.

This stage, then, sees an attempt to rediscover genuine identity and certainty, although like Western postmodernism it seems at times to be a certainty of uncertainty. The poet needs answers to his existential soul-searching: ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr and al-Bayyātī want to close the circle; Adonis’ answer is that there is no answer. In this his postmodernism differs from the others’: flux, rather than union, is closer to perfection. Only continual oscillation between union and dispersion keeps the individual alive. This Heraclitean flux may entail harmony or conflict, but he derives meaning from the dialectic rather than the union itself. The reassertion of specific identity, for Adonis, is a necessary step on the path towards universal identity, i.e. belonging to a genuinely global “culture of the future”. This flux explains the constantly changing form his neo-Sufism takes. Poetic form is chaotic and kaleidoscopic in his hands: he writes beyond form to reflect the world’s permanent transformation. Put another way, he is uniting form and content at the point of unity – the *majma‘ al-baḥrayn*, in Sufi terminology – to reveal their essential identity.

As noted, this stage sees a shift from collective to individual, from sociological to psychological. The poet now tries to restore his cosmic, ecological relationship with nature and the earth and give it renewed meaning. The greater balance between east and west, between esoteric and exoteric, is embodied in the archetypal notion of *al-insān al-kāmil*, the perfect man, who stands on the bridge between the known and the unknown. In this sense, the neo-Sufi poet strives to reach forwards toward the hypothetical perfect man of the future and at the same time back to the archaic man of the past, when human consciousness was still undifferentiated from nature. However, the return to nature can itself only be cultivated: it will never reach complete original wholeness. The poet’s long acculturation, the dubious gift of civilization, has changed him irrevocably. Such is the case, too, with the idea of return to undifferentiated childhood. The child archetype and its psychological equivalents – such as the Sufi concept of *tawakkul* – feature strongly in this stage. But the notion of a second childhood is always an unfulfilled dream: “The

time has passed / For you to be yourself, for you to know who you are – / Your childhood has gone.”⁵⁴⁶ Childhood is both past and future, but like al-Niffarī’s search for the divine, the future is perpetually deferred. Religious observances, as in ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr’s case, are closely connected with the image of childhood: the ritual repetition and retelling of the religious myth links the conscious mind with the original condition of unconsciousness, thus fulfilling a psychological need:

... embrace me, for the divine voice
 Cannot find a path to my ears or eyes
 Become an earth,
 Break open a cave for me in your dark soil,
 And swallow me...⁵⁴⁷

Thus ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr attempts to make his peace with God, to reconcile himself to his self and become what he always was. Individuation here is an attempt to return to the point of origin, the unconsciousness of childhood, thus closing the circle. This is the definitive neo-Sufi journey from inward orientation to outward and back again. To prevent his childhood psyche from falling into nothingness, he returns to the mysteries of religion, of which he now has a deeper and subtler understanding. For the sake of wholeness, he must keep the idea of God alive in some form, and thus regains his religiosity. However, his deeper understanding renders the general principle of God unacceptable: his is an excessively subjective experience.

As this attempted return to childhood suggests, neo-Sufism can be seen as a kind of romanticism, albeit steeled with a heavy dose of realism. Despite their political commitments, all three poets were deeply romantic. As noted above, the poet finds himself undergoing a compulsory *fanā*, ‘death in life’. In its Kierkegaardian sense, this means being dead existentially although physically alive, whereas in its more positive Sufi conception it is a stage on the way towards universal consciousness. Jung suggests that those who have landed themselves in such a ‘Kierkegaardian neurosis’ are often susceptible to “the magic and novelty of Eastern symbols”,

⁵⁴⁶ Adonis, *Ihtifāʾ an bil-ashyāʾ al-ghāmiḍa al-wāḍiḥa*, p. 30

⁵⁴⁷ Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr, ‘al-Mawt Baynhumā’, in *al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmila*, pp. 47-8.

since that is the essential function of such symbols.⁵⁴⁸ Finding himself in this state of living death, he may attempt a rebirth by sublimating it into *baqā'*, thus transcending his anomie. However, the age of prophets has passed, and these are irrevocably modern, secular thinkers. The other route towards wholeness, or restoration of Lacan's "lost Real", is romantic love, in which Adonis and al-Bayyātī found great succour. Neo-Sufi poetry entails a synthesis of self and other on both the personal and the cultural level, and is simultaneously open to multiple interpretations. It unites romantic and committed poetry in an integrated whole.

The major difficulty with the third stage is that the poet's psychological development has inevitably continued while the political reality has remained static. The paradox of neo-Sufi thought is that mysticism is more postmodern than modern, and thus effectively betrays the secular ideal. Neo-Sufism is the product of individual intellectuals who have been exiled from the Arab masses. There therefore arises a highly problematic incompatibility between the neo-Sufi position, which has returned to the inner, subjective experience, and the external *status quo*. The gap between Adonis' criticisms of Arab reality and his poetry steadily increases: as the poet retreats into inner exile, the individual and the collective become fundamentally out of synch. Individually, the poet enters an uncertain postmodern state before even experiencing the luxury of solid political foundations. His psychological life has overshot external reality, whether deliberately or not, leaving him in total exile. In this sense, neo-Sufism is a symptom of the effects of globalisation on a region where, for both internal and external reasons, a genuine, organic modernity has been unable to fully emerge, and the poet's descent into irrational postmodernity, although a natural psychological development, therefore seems outwardly perverse.

The tri-stage neo-Sufi development reflects the circular nature of human psychic life, both on an individual and a social level. Just as prehistoric polytheism gave way to a monotheistic divinity, which led towards modern rational values, and in turn to a simultaneously atheistic and polytheistic postmodernity (since atheism and polytheism are effectively the same), the neo-Sufi poet journeys from early experiences in popular religion to a modern secular mindset and finally back to inner religious experiences. As Jung puts it in his discussion of Nietzsche: "The gods first

⁵⁴⁸ Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 8

lived in superhuman power and beauty on top of snow-clad mountains or in the darkness of caves, woods and seas. Later on they drew together into one god, and then that god became man.”⁵⁴⁹ Adonis’ graduation from the premodern heterodoxy of °Alawism through modern rationalist ideologies to his embrace of a postmodern esoterism provides a definitive example. The striking parallel between °Alawism and postmodern values emphasizes the circular nature of this journey: from the womb of the unconscious, out into consciousness, and then a third movement which can be seen as both forward towards a prophetic superconsciousness (i.e. Niffarian *waqfa*) and simultaneously back towards the unconscious. (In this sense the poets recognised how progressive the original Sufis were.) Indeed, *waqfa* can only be achieved by transcending °*ilm* and *ma°rifa*: Adonis could only rediscover al-Suhrawardī’s ‘East’ via the ‘West’. His life embodies this principle: travelling outwards in search of the self, and only reaching it by persevering beyond the other, as if circumnavigating the globe completely to reach universal consciousness. This brought him back to his origin, which is the goal of mysticism:

I was born in a village
 Small and secret like a womb
 And I have never left it –
 I love the ocean, not the shores.⁵⁵⁰

There is a remarkable parallel between the passage from al-Suhrawardī quoted by Adonis⁵⁵¹ and Jung’s comparison of these stages of life to the sun’s daily cycle. Having shone its light upon the world, it withdraws in order to illumine itself. Man likewise retreats into his dark, inner self, (or increasingly adopts a reactionary, doctrinaire position as an alternative to self-illumination). The semi-circular arc of the sun’s visible journey can be a metaphor for these stages: childhood, rising in the East, prior to consciousness; adulthood, when the sun is rising towards its zenith; and the return, when the sun has passed the midpoint and descends towards the horizon, and man returns once more to unconsciousness. The first and third stages are certainly different, but they share the important characteristic of immersion in unconscious psychic events. Sun analogies, common in Sufism, include Qushayrī’s ideas on Sufi vision: “He is like the one who is in the light of the lamp when the darkness is intensifying, and when the sun comes up over him, it conquers the

⁵⁴⁹ Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 102

⁵⁵⁰ Adonis, *Ihtifā’an bil-ashyā’ al-ghāmiḍa al-wāḍiḥa*, p. 59

⁵⁵¹ Adonis, *al-Šūfiyya wa al-Sūryāliyya*, pp. 178-9

light of the lamp, and the light of the lamp dwindles in comparison to the light of the sun.” Moreover, such parables also show that there is considerable continuity as well as difference between these stages. The apparently abrupt turns in the life of a poet like Adonis belie a deeper consistency. The ideological inclinations are perhaps as much a submission to unconscious forces as the later neo-Sufism, in which the more experienced poet moves his Absolutism to an individual level.

Esoteric/Exoteric Postmodernity: Neo-Sufism versus Political Islam

Just as the second, ideological stage yielded to the re-emergence of esoteric ideas, so it led to an exoteric revival. With the failure of ‘revolutionary’ postcolonial nationalisms and socialisms that had previously derived their legitimacy from overturning imperialism, two parallel trends emerged, neo-Sufism and political Islam, each interpreting the Arab-Islamic heritage according to its own philosophical preconceptions. Both were extreme reactions to a fragmented political and psychological reality that effectively equated the concepts of freedom and divinity, although this in turn depended on transcendent or imminent interpretations. The contemporary conflict continues a philosophical struggle within Islamic civilization dating back to figures such as ibn al-°Arabī on one side and al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) and ibn Ḥanbal (780-855) on the other, over the nature of Islamic truth. This contest between esoteric and exoteric postmodernisms for the soul and future direction of Islam, whose relevance is greatly increased by globalization, hinges very much on the inherently dualistic nature of language: the holy word is open to both figurative and literalist interpretations. The danger of mixing ancient, historically specific religious texts with modern methods of information processing underscores the wisdom of the neo-Sufi inclination towards metaphorical exegesis and deconstruction of the monolithic edifice of the Qur’ān as the ‘uncreated’ – and therefore ahistorical – word of God. In contrast to literalist exoterism, metaphorical exegesis is central to the neo-Sufi worldview:

The poetic nature of the metaphor lies in its refusal of authority, in being an innovation, like a perpetual beginning, with no past. As a force for producing questions, it renews man, it renews thought, language, and their relationship with things. It is a rejection of the present existence in search of another one. For all metaphors transcend: just as language overcomes itself in them, so, through them, does the reality that they articulate. Thus the metaphor joins us to the other dimension of things – their invisible dimension.⁵⁵²

In the abovementioned psychological development, a radical split clearly emerged in the third stage, when secular ideologies were rejected in favour of more culturally authentic ideas. When the modern intellectual despaired of the political *status quo* and the overbearing structures of state power, he faced a choice: to reformulate ideology along more authentic lines and continue the outward struggle through whatever means necessary, or to transcend ideology altogether in

⁵⁵² Ibid, p. 144

favour of the metaphysical realm. Although the dividing line is always indistinct, two broad paths lay ahead: the Islamist, external, literal, social, objective, or the neo-Sufi, internal, metaphorical, psychological, subjective. Faced with the indestructible omnipotence of the state, the neo-Sufi trajectory effectively sought refuge in subverting the structures of language and rational belief systems that maintained the order of things, since it seemed to be precisely such thought that had caused the crisis. While textual freedom alone could not remake the world, it at least offered some compensation for the lack of political freedom. Adonis, for one, espoused the postmodernist perception of reason and logic as a closed system that perpetuates an oppressive political order and can only be broken through recourse to the irrational experience, which he found in Sufi esoterism. As the quote above shows, his attempt to recreate the Arabic language reflected his desire to recreate reality entirely, in accordance with his deconstruction-reconstruction dialectic. If poetic intoxication led to quasi-mystical ecstasy, this might deconstruct the rigid system of moral opposites supposedly at the root of the static order. But this endeavour was perhaps ultimately overwhelmed by *forces majeures*, larger cultural shifts beyond the scope of the mere individual. Ultimately, language provided no more of a spiritual home than did the alienating political reality: poetic inspiration might deconstruct, but it cannot reconstruct. Al-Bayyāfī's "Exile is my homeland / Words are my exile" is testament to this.⁵⁵³ This emptiness perhaps encouraged Adonis' increasingly desperate preoccupation with the deconstruction aspect of his dialectic, as the static order of which he despaired grew increasingly entrenched. At a linguistic level, the breakdown of Islamic truth in the face of modernity could also lead paradoxically to an intensification in the authority of the Qur'ān to compensate for the lost authority of the religious institution, leading to literalist exoterism as well as neo-mysticism.

These esoteric and exoteric postmodernisms have arisen both in parallel and in diametrical opposition, often interpenetrating and using similar terminology and themes. The ambiguous relationship between them is a corollary of their origins the same historical circumstances and socio-cultural conditions, particularly since the 1960s: lack of political freedoms and economic opportunities, disillusionment with postcolonial reality, substantial population increases and urban influxes. The urban setting was instrumental in the alienation of both neo-Sufi and Islamist intellectuals. As al-Bayyāfī recognized, the modern city could be a congested, soulless, violent

⁵⁵³ Al-Bayyāfī, 'al-Mawt wa al-Qindīl', in *Ḥubb wa Mawt wa Nafy*, pp. 180

place, devoid of hope and relief, in stark contrast to the beauty and innocence of rustic life: “I came from the country... and my first shock was discovering the reality of the city... It was a false city [and] as for its great civilizations that had lived for several centuries on the banks of the Tigris, I felt they had died, never to return. It was not that I wanted them to return, but I wanted the city to extend like a tributary rising up and running down into a river, embracing it and melting into it.”⁵⁵⁴

Analysis of the relationship between the esoteric and exoteric trends helps to contextualise the neo-Sufi ideal within both Arab and global contemporaneity. Whilst neo-Sufism and Islamism can be viewed as parallel trajectories, they are fundamentally opposed, most notably towards their recognition of the other. Both are products of the crisis of modernity and political participation in a world that was entering a new phase of globalisation, thus creating a dangerous cultural schism. The two trends would react to globalisation in different ways, either inadvertently legitimising its economic imperialism in one case or forming a humanist counter-globalism in the other. As an alternative discourse of dissent, neo-Sufism stands in diametric contrast to the ideological universalism of both economic globalism and Salafī Islamism, which, while ostensibly the worst of enemies, seem also to be locked together in a mutually legitimising ‘unholy exoteric alliance’. Economic globalisation, the logic of late capitalism, is itself supported amongst other things by a strongly exoteric religious framework, while Salafī Islamism’s violently reactionary, hyper-ideological programme for universal victory only perpetuates the cycle of antagonism. Both ideologies find their meaning and legitimacy via a confrontational opposite, monopolising ‘good’ against the ‘evil’ of the other. Neo-Sufi human universalism, however, simultaneously rejects this unholy alliance and transcends its tendency to divide the world into discrete ontological camps. In this sense, it belongs to the incipient “anti-globalization” movement, which is itself also universal in scope. The logical culmination of the neo-Sufi ideal is a universal human message, one rendered all the more important in a rapidly polarising age when these competing ideological globalisms vie to extend their stranglehold over the impressionable, the alienated and the economically dependent. In an age when the compatibility of Islam and democracy is hotly debated, the significance of Sufi principles is their

⁵⁵⁴ Al-Bayyātī, *Tajribatī al-Shi‘riyya*, pp. 19-20

inclusivity: they remove the sharp boundaries that are a feature of exoteric interpretations and therefore encourage identification with other religious and traditions.

As attempts to overcome their despair at the modern order of things, both exoteric and esoteric revivalisms distinguish between Islam as concept and Islam as historically practised, and therefore return to the roots of the civilization, claiming to have inherited the real source of truth. However, while both claim religious authenticity in their search for a new order, their use and interpretation of various authorities differ markedly. Islam can be interpreted as a political ideology, in the mould of institutional order and orthodoxy, or as a personal spirituality, in the mould of creative chaos and heresy. Both are influenced, directly or indirectly, by Marxist ideas, which they relate to the Islamic principle of human equality before God, as well as existentialist thinkers such as Nietzsche. The ongoing confrontation with the cultural other inevitably reopened the infamous ‘gates of *ijtihād*’, independent or innovative reasoning, that had been closed some centuries earlier. On both sides, new interpretations of age-old principles reflected the endeavour to find a place for Arab-Islamic culture in the fickle modern world. The meaning of mortality became a point of difference. If death was interpreted metaphorically by the neo-Sufis as ‘death in life’, whether spiritual emptiness or mystical abstraction, for the more literalistic thinker it could mean physical death itself, and therefore “martyrdom”. Having failed to recreate the perfect society, the latterday *jihādī*, in contrast to the neo-Sufi withdrawal into the “inner Andalus”, may ultimately find that same return to psychological truth (and unconsciousness) in far more violent and apocalyptic way, effectively making a literal interpretation of the Sufi *fanā*. In both cases, death entailed liberation from despair, the ultimate existential predicament, as a return to the point of origin, God. Both are attempts to reunite the self with what it has lost from its state of childhood / cultural innocence, thus restoring meaning to existence.

Progressive neo-Sufism and reactionary Islamism, or esoteric and exoteric postmodernism, agree on several points: the *status quo* is fundamentally flawed and change is necessary. Arab-Islamic civilization must be revived, and on its own terms. However, they differ entirely on how to achieve this. It is worth noting that both camps interpreted the 1967 defeat as a vindication of their criticism of the political order and their radical programmes for change. On a theoretical level, their differences can be broadly defined as: literalist versus metaphoricalist; dogmatic versus heterodox; conservative versus progressive; orthopraxic versus looking for internal

meaning; monocultural versus pluralist; homogenizing versus embracing difference; oppositional versus holistic; based on transcendence versus immanence; theological versus mystical. Exoteric and esoteric postmodernisms reflect alternative interpretations of *jihād*: the “Lesser” struggle against the external enemy versus the “Greater” struggle for the inner self. They also have very different conceptions of the relationship between being and time: the exoteric is deeply retrospective and past-oriented, while the esoteric position, following ibn al-ʿArabī’s notion of time as merely a perspectival rather than ontological reality, is essentially future-oriented, aiming to recreate the time-bound through an experience beyond the limits of space-time. Neo-Sufism combines existentialism and mysticism to affirm that human subjectivity is essentially restless and dynamic, ‘a process and a potential, not a thing’, i.e. avoiding reification of the self.

The fundamental difference between these positions lies in the exoterist positing of an inherent separation between man and God/nature. From this perspective, the two domains (inside and outside the *mandala*) are essentially discrete, thus maintaining the fundamental division of the world into distinct ontological camps, while the esoteric view has them as one continuous existence bridged by a theoretically traversable *barzakh*. For the exoterists, the external values of the *mandala* represent truth; the interior values for the esoterists. As with modern rationalism, from which it borrows, the exoterist position fails to create psychological unity, since this requires uniting the inner and the outer. Moreover, the literalist focus on exteriority inclines the exoterists to imitate the outer actions of historical heroes like Muḥammad, rather than the spirit and dynamic values that such figures espoused, or to embrace the products of modern thought rather than the intellectual processes that generated them. However, it should be emphasized that there is no distinct dividing line between these positions. Naturally, Arab intellectuals often exemplify an idiosyncratic blend of exoteric and esoteric, without falling neatly into either category – as we have seen in the case of both ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr and Adonis – and the rise of esoteric postmodernism, with its ostensibly religious themes and terminology, may even have assisted the rise of its exoteric counterpart.

Finally, in their yearning for civilizational rebirth, both esoteric and exoteric postmodernisms hark back nostalgically to an imagined ‘just community’ of a previous ‘golden age’, dubious historical methodologies notwithstanding. In both cases, it is hoped that a viable future may be based on imitation of this just community. But the contrasting ideals of Arab Granada – the

prototypical perfect society in the Arab poetic imagination – and the original, ‘pure’ Muḥammadan state of the 7th century only reinforce divisions between the neo-Sufi and Islamist worldview.

Endpiece

In summation, neo-Sufism should be seen less as a specific movement in its own right than as an internally-split intellectual shift which forms but part of broader movements in Arab cultural life. Beyond that, it is part of a more general shift beyond belief in the efficacy of rational ideologies and sciences to reach truth and provide an enlightened answer to the needs of mankind. For these poets the debate is essentially the same as it was in the “liberal age”, albeit in more fraught circumstances: how to match the West’s advances without sacrificing personal, cultural, national or religious identity, how to reconcile the permanence of Arab-Islamic civilization with a fickle modern world. Contemporary societies are faced with the need for simultaneous continuity and change. Hence the poet’s attempt to synthesize, refusing to view the cultural other as a monolithic entity to be rejected outright, and to discover libertarian elements in his own heritage that might provide the key to a brighter future.

The neo-Sufi thinkers represent the latest generation to attempt the monumental task of civilizational reconciliation, between a materially superior West and an underachieving Arab-Islamic world, and regeneration, between the legacy of a glorious Arab past and the burden of a relatively dismal present. As an internal and external exile, Adonis amply problematizes the Janus-like nature of dissenting discourse in the context of a ‘holy language’ such as Arabic. Can – or should – the language of resistance and legitimacy be decoupled from that of religion? Even the neo-Sufi critique, while overwhelmingly secular, is prone to religious motifs and terminology, as it pushes towards a specifically Arab brand of postmodernism before even the enormous but necessary project of an Arab modernity has reached fruition.

Modern Arab intellectuals and poets have ended up conspicuously powerless, fulminating vainly against *forces majeures*. Many have therefore turned to seek inner perfection. This crisis functions on all levels, from linguistic and cultural to political and spiritual. Neo-Sufism is a radical reaction to that crisis, enacted likewise on a spiritual level, i.e. at the deepest level of the human psyche, both consciously and unconsciously. Like its political alter ego, it desperately tries to restore meaning to the world. By integrating the divine and the human, but moving the religious impulse into the personal domain, it upholds the need for separation between religion and state without losing the transcendental aspect. Inspired by cultural exchange with European

existentialist philosophy, it consciously champions humanist values (as opposed to being accountable to a transcendent God, which effectively legitimises worldly power). It sees humanism as a natural progression within an authentically Islamic civilization. Crucially, therefore, this Islamic authenticity can be at once both itself and a genuine component of human civilization at large.

Sufism is an intellectual tradition of pluralism, enlightenment and progression indigenous to the Arab-Islamic world. In a modern, spiritually impoverished generation, these thinkers were at the forefront of an alternative reinvention of tradition, one that allowed an organic and authentic continuity between past and future, Islam and democracy, tradition and modernity, and thus established the nucleus of a secure identity.

Bibliography

- °Abd Allah, Umar, *The Islamic Struggle in Syria*, (Berkeley, 1983)
- °Abd al-Ṣabūr, Ṣalāḥ, *Aqūlu Lakum*, (Cairo, 1961)
- *Aḥlām al-Fāris al-Qadīm* (Beirut, 1964)
- *Ma'sāt al-Hallāj*, (Beirut, 1965)
- *Ḥayātī fī al-Shi'ar*, (Beirut, 1969)
- *Ta'ammulāt fī Zaman Jarīḥ* (Beirut, 1971)
- *Shajar al-Layl* (Beirut, 1972)
- *al-Ibhār fī al-Dhākira* (Beirut, 1979)
- 'Tajribatī fī al-Shi'ar', *Fuṣūl* 5 (1981), pp. 14-18
- *Dīwān*, (Beirut, 1983)
- *al-Nās fī Bilādī* (Beirut, 1986)
- *al-A'māl al-Kāmila*, (Beirut, 1986)
- *Murder in Baghdad*, tr. K. Semaan, (Leiden, 1972)
- Abū Naṣr, Jamīl, *The Tijāniyya, a Sufī order in the Modern World*, (London, 1965)
- Adonis, (°Alī Aḥmad Sa'īd Esber), *Aghānī Mihyār al-Dimashqī*, (Beirut, 1960-1)

- *Kitāb al-Taḥawwulāt wa al-Hijra fī Āqālim al-Nahār wa al-Layl*, (Beirut, 1965)
- *al-Shiʿriyya al-ʿArabiyya*, (Beirut, 1985)
- *Iḥtifāʾ an bil-ashyāʾ al-ghāmiḍa al-wāḍiḥa*, (Beirut, 1988)
- *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, (London, 1990)
- *The Pages of Day and Night*, tr. Samuel Hazo, (Illinois, 1994)
- *al-Ṣūfiyya wa al-Sūryāliyya*, (Beirut, 1995)
- *Hādhā Huwa Ismī wa Qaṣāʾid Ukhrā*, (Cyprus, 1996)
- ‘There are many Easts in the East and many Wests in the West’, *Banipal* 2, (1998)
- *al-Thābit wa al-Mutaḥawwil: Baḥth fī al-Ibdāʿ wa al-Itbāʿ ʿinda al-ʿArab*, (Beirut, 2002)
- *Awwil al-Jism Ākhir al-Baḥr*, (Beirut, 2003)
- *Tanabbuʾ ayyuhā al-Aʿmā*, (Beirut, 2003)
- *If Only the Sea Could Sleep: Love Poems*, (Copenhagen, 2003)
- *al-Muḥīt al-Aswad*, (Dār al-Sāqī, London, 2005)
- Ahmed, Akbar, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise*, (New York, 2004)
- Ajami, Fouad, *The Arab Predicament* (Cambridge, 1992)
- *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Nation’s Odyssey* (New York, 1988)

°Ammar, °Alī Ḥasan, *al-Šūfiyya wa al-Siyāsa fī Miṣr*, (Cairo, 1997)

Anṣārī, Muḥammad °Abd al-Ḥaqq, *Sufism and Shari°ah: A Study of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī's Effort to Reform Sufism*, (Leicester, 1986)

Arberry, A.J., *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, (London, 1990)

Arnaldez, R., 'Ma°rifa', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (EI) ed. Bearman et al. New ed., (Leiden, 2000), vol 6. pp. 568-571

——— 'Al-Insān al-Kāmil', *EI*, vol. 3, pp. 1239-41

Asfour, John, 'Adonis and Muḥammad al-Māghuṭ: Two Voices in a Burning Land', *Journal of Arabic Literature (JAL)* 20 (1989), pp. 20-30

Ates, A, 'Ibn al-°Arabī', *EI*, vol 3, pp. 707-11

Azouqa, Aida, 'Al-Bayyātī and W.B.Yeats as Mythmakers: A Comparative Study', *JAL* 30 (1999), pp. 258-85

——— 'Defamiliarization in the Poetry of °Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī and T.S.Eliot: A Comparative Study', *JAL* 32 (2001), pp. 167-211

Badawi, M.M., *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Verse* (Oxford, 1970)

——— *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*, (Cambridge, 1975)

——— *Modern Arabic Literature and the West* (London, 1985)

——— *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt* (Cambridge, 1987)

Bakhtiar, Laleh *Sufi: Expressions of the Mystic Quest* (London, 1976)

- Baldick, Julian, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*, (London, 2000)
- Balqasim, Khālīd, *Adūnīs wa al-Khiṭāb al-Ṣūfī*, (Casablanca, 2000)
- Bar-Asher, Meir and Aryeh Kofsky, *The Nusayri-Alawi Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy*, (Leiden, 2002)
- Barrett, William *Irrational Man: A Study in Existentialist Philosophy*, (New York, 1990)
- Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text*, tr. Richard Miller (New York, 1975),
- al-Bayyātī, °Abd al-Wahhāb, *Sifr al-Faqr wa al-Thawra* (Beirut, 1965)
- *al-Mawt fī al-Ḥayāt* (Beirut, 1968)
- *al-Kitāba °Alā al-Ṭīn* (Beirut, 1970)
- *Qaṣā'id Ḥubb °alā Bawābāt al-°Alam al-Sab°* (Baghdad, 1971)
- *Dīwān*, (Beirut, 1971)
- *Sīra Dhātīyya li-Sāriq al-Nār* (Baghdad, 1974)
- *Bustān °Ā'isha* (Cairo, 1989)
- *Ḥubb wa Mawt wa Nafy*, Love, Death and Exile, tr. Bassam K. Frangieh (Washington, D.C., 1990)
- *Tajribatī al-Shi°riyya*, (Beirut, 1994)
- *Bukā'iyya ilā Ḥafīz al-Shīrāzī* (Beirut, 1999)

——— *Nuṣūṣ Sharqiyya* (Cyprus, 1999)

——— *‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī fī Bayt al-Shi‘r*, (Tūnis, 1999)

al-Biṣṭāmī, Abū Yazīd, *Les Dits de Bistami*, tr. Abdelwahab Meddeb, (France, 1989)

Black, Anthony, *The History of Islamic Political Thought from the Prophet to the Present*, (Edinburgh, 2001)

Blake, William, *Poems and Prophecies*, (London, 1991)

Bloom, Harold, *The Anxiety of Influence*, (London, 1975)

Boullata, Issa, *Modern Arab Poets 1950-1975*, (Washington DC, 1976)

——— ed, *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature*, (Colorado, 1980)

——— and T. DeYoung, ed, *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Literature*, (Fayetteville, 1997)

——— ‘The Masks of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī’, *JAL* 32 (2001), pp. 107-18

Bowie, Malcolm, *Lacan*, (London, 1991)

Burckhardt, Titus, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, (Lahore, 1963)

Camus, Michel, *Adonis: Le Visionnaire*, (Monaco, 2000)

Chodkiewicz, M., *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabi*, (Cambridge, 1993)

Chittick, William, 'Rumi and *Wahdat al-Wujud*', in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi* (Los Angeles, 1987)

——— *Sufism: A Short Introduction*, (Oxford, 2000)

——— 'Wahdat al-Shuhūd', *EI*, vol. 11, pp. 37-9

Coates, Peter, *Ibn Arabi and Modern Thought: The History of Taking Metaphysics Seriously*, (Oxford, 2002)

Dāhir, °Ādil, *al-Wujūd wa al-Shi'r: Dirāsa Falsafiyya fī Shi'r Adūnīs* (Damascus, 2000)

Darwīsh, Usaima, *Masār al-Taḥawwulāt: Qirā'a fī Shi'r Adūnīs*, (Beirut, 1992)

Davies, Paul, *Romanticism and Esoteric Tradition: Studies in Imagination* (New York, 1998)

De Jong, F. 'Kuṭb', *EI*, vol 5, pp. 542-6

Du Pasquier, Roger, *Unveiling Islam*, (Cambridge, 1992)

Eagleton, Terry, *An Introduction to Literary Theory*, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1983)

——— *After Theory*, (London, 2003)

Eliot, T. S., *Murder in the Cathedral*, (London, 1968)

Enani, Mohamed, tr. *Angry Voices: Anthology of the New Off-Beat Egyptian Poets*, (Fayetteville, 2003)

Ernst, C., 'Shaṭḥ', *EI*, vol 9, pp. 361-2

- Ewing, Katherine Pratt, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis and Islam* (Durham, N. C., 1997)
- Falconar, A., *Sufi Literature and the Journey to Immortality*, (Delhi, 1991)
- Foucault, Michel, ed. Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, (London, 1984)
- Freud, Sigmund, *On Dreams*, (Toronto, 2001)
- Gardet, L., 'Ḥaqīqa', *EI*, vol. 3, pp. 75-6
- Gardiner, P., *Kierkegaard: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford, 1988)
- Gellner, Ernest, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, (London, 1992)
- Hafez, Sabry, 'The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel's Aesthetic Response', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57, (1994), pp. 93-112
- al-Ḥallāj, al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr, *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn: The Great Sufic Text on the Unity of Reality*, (Lahore, 1978)
- Halm, H., 'Nuṣayriyya', *EI*, vol 8, pp. 145-8
- Ḥasan, °Ammar °Alī, *al-Šūfiyya wa al-Siyāsa fī Miṣr*, (Cairo, 1997)
- Heidegger, Martin, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, (New York, 1971)
- Heraclitus, *Fragments*, tr. Brooks Haxton, (London, 2001)
- Hourani, Albert, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge, 1983)
- *A History of the Arab Peoples*, (London, 1991)

Hunwick, J.O., 'Taṣawwuf', *EI*, vol. 10, pp. 313-40

ibn al-ʿArabī, Muḥy al-Dīn, *The Interpreter of Desires*, tr. R. Nicholson *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, (London, 1978)

Izutsu, Toshihiko, *Language and Magic: Studies in the Magical Function of Speech*, (Tokyo, 1956)

——— *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism* (Berkeley, 1984)

——— *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things*, (Tokyo, 1994)

Jabrā, Ibrāhīm, 'Modern Arabic Literature and the West', *JAL* 2 (1971), pp. 76-91

Jayyūsī, Salmā Khadrā', *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry*, (Leiden, 1977)

——— ed, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York, 1987)

Jung, Carl, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, 1938)

——— *The Undiscovered Self* (London, 1957)

——— *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (London, 1990)

——— *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (London, 1995)

——— *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (London, 2001)

——— *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature* (London, 2001)

——— *Essays on Contemporary Events* (London, 2002)

Kamāl, A. and Ḥallāq, W. eds, *Tradition, Modernity and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature*, (Leiden, 2000)

Kaptein, N, 'Tariqa', *EI*, vol 10, pp. 243-57

Khairallah, As'ad, 'Adūnīs and the Quest for a New God', in *Myths, historical archetypes and symbolic figures in Arabic literature: Towards a new hermeneutic approach: Proceedings of the International Symposium in Beirut, June 25th - June 30th, 1996*

——— 'Love and the Body in Modern Arabic Poetry', in Allen and Kilpatrick, ed, *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, London, 1995, pp. 210-23

Khourī, Mounah, *Studies in Contemporary Arabic Poetry and Criticism* (Piedmont, C.A., 1987)

Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Sickness unto Death*, (London, 1989)

——— *Stages on Life's Way*, (Princeton, 1992)

Knapp, Bettina, *Exile and the Writer: Exoteric and Esoteric Experiences*, (Pennsylvania, 1991)

Kristeva, Julia, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, (New York, 1984)

Lacan, Jacques, *Ecrits*, (London, 2001)

Laroui, 'Abdallah, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?* (London, 1976)

Lewisohn, Leonard, 'Tawakkul', *EI*, vol 10, pp. 376-8

Lings, Martin, *What is Sufism?* (Surrey, 1975)

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (London, 1996)

MacDonald, D., 'al-Ghayb', *EI*, vol 2, pp. 1025-6

Massignon, Louis, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, tr. & ed. Herbert Mason, (Princeton, 1994)

——— 'al-Ḥallāj', *EI*, vol 3, pp. 99-104

Mawāqif 1 (1968),

Meier, F., 'Bishr al-Ḥāfi', *EI*, vol 1, pp. 1244-6

Miṣrī, Nash'at, *Ṣalāḥ 'Abd al-Ṣabūr: al-Insān wa al-Shi'r*, (Cairo, 1983)

Moreh, Shmuel, ed, *Studies in Modern Arabic Prose and Poetry*, (Leiden, 1988)

al-Musāwī, Muḥsin Jāsim, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel; Debating Ambivalence*, (Leiden, 2003)

——— 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī's Poetics of Exile', *JAL* 32 (2001), pp. 212-38

Nicholson, Reynold, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, (Cambridge, 1921)

——— *The Idea of Personality in Sufism*, (Cambridge, 1923)

——— *The Mystics of Islam*, (London, 1966)

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, (London, 1961)

——— *Why I Am So Wise*, (Penguin, London, 2004),

al-Niffarī, Muḥammad ibn °Abd al-Jabbār, *The Mawāqif and Makhāṭabāt*, tr. & ed. A. J. Arberry, (Cambridge, 1935)

Noorani, Yaseen, 'Visual Modernism in the Poetry of °Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī', *JAL* 32 (2001), pp. 239-55

Nurbakhsh, Javad, *In The Tavern of Ruin*, (New York, 1978)

——— *The Psychology of Sufism* (London, 1992)

O'Brien, Donal Cruise, *The Mourides of Senegal*, (Oxford, 1971)

O'Grady, Desmond, ed. *Ten Modern Arab Poets*, (Dublin, 1992)

Phillips, K.J., *Dying Gods in Twentieth Century Fiction*, (Toronto, 1990)

Prochwicz-Studnicka, Bozena, 'The Mystical Dimension of Ṣalāḥ °Abd al-Ṣabūr's Poetry', *Folia Orientalia* 35 (1999), pp. 107-117

al-Qashānī, °Abd al-Razzāq, ed, *A Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms*, (London, 1991)

Quṭb, Sayyid, *Milestones*, (Indianapolis, 1990)

Raḥmān, F., 'Baqā' wa Fanā', *EI*, vol 1, p. 951

al-Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *The Essential Rumi*, tr. C. Barks & J. Moyne (London, 1995)

——— *We Are Three*, tr. C. Barks (Athens, 1987)

Ruthven, Malise, *Islam in the World*, (London, 2000)

- *A Fury for God: The Islamist Attack on America*, (London, 2002)
- *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning* (Oxford, 2004)
- Said, Edward, *Reflections on Exile and other Literary and Cultural Essays*, (London, 2001)
- Sardar, Ziauddin, *Introducing Chaos* (Cambridge, 2002)
- *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures* (London, 2003)
- Schimmel, Annemarie, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill, 1975)
- ‘Mawlana Rumi: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow’, in *Poetry & Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi* (Los Angeles, 1987)
- Schuon, Frithjof, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, (Lahore, 1985),
- Selīm, Samāḥ, ‘Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj and the Poetry of Ecstasy’, *JAL* 21 (1990), pp. 26-42
- Shah, Idries, *The Sufis*, (London, 1999)
- Shankland, David, *The Alevis in Turkey: The Emergence of a Secular Islamic Tradition* (London, 2003)
- Sharābī, Hishām, ed, *The Next Arab Decade: Alternative Futures*, (Colorado, 1988)
- Simawe, Saadi, ‘The lives of the Sufi masters in ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī’s poetry’, *JAL* 32 (2001), pp. 119-41
- Sirriyeh, Elizabeth, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World*, (Richmond, 1999)

Smart, J. ed., *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Language and Literature*, (Richmond, 1996)

Snir, Reuven, 'A Study of "Elegy for al-Ḥallāj"', *JAL* 25 (1994), pp. 245-56

——— 'Human Existence according to Kafka and ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr', *Juṣūr* 5, (1989), pp. 31-43

——— 'Neo-Sufism in Modern Arabic Poetry' in *Sufi: A Journal of Sufism* 27 (1995), pp. 23-27

——— 'The Poetic Creative Process According to Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr', in Ami Elad, ed, *Writer, Culture, Text: Studies in Modern Arabic Literature*, (Fredricton, 1993) pp. 74-88

al-Udhari, Abdallah, ed, *Victims of a Map*, (London, 1984)

Van Den Burgh, S., 'ʿAyn', *EI*, vol 1, pp. 784-5

Van Ess, J. 'Tashbih wa Tanzīh', *EI*, vol. 10, pp. 341-4

Walia, Shelley, *Edward Said and the Writing of History*, (Cambridge, 2001)

Weil, Simone, *The Need for Roots*, (London, 2002)

Weismann, I, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus*, (Leiden, 2000)

Wilcox, Lynne, *Sufism and Psychology*, (Chicago, 1995)

Yamak, Labib Zuwiyya, *The Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party: An Ideological Analysis*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966)

Yapp, Malcolm, *The Near East since the First World War: A History to 1995*, (Harlow, 1996)

Zeidan, Joseph, 'Myth and Symbol in the poetry of Adonis and Yūsuf al-Khāl', *JAL* 10 (1975)
pp. 70-94

Zelkina, Anna, *In Search of God and Freedom: Sufi Responses to the Russian Advances in the North Caucasus*, (London, 2000)